







# GREYMORE:

*A Story of Country Life.*

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# GREYMORE:

## A STORY OF COUNTRY LIFE.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE TWO NURSES.

WHEN Mrs. Rivers, after a night of uninterrupted repose, was told of Fanny's illness, she bore the news with far more equanimity than if she had heard it when harassed by want of sleep, and worried by past exertions. It was no part of her nature to fancy herself neglected, by not having been consulted about the arrangements of the preceding day; and when she met Katharine, her warm kiss, and the simple words, "You have been a good, clever girl, Katharine!" assured the latter that she had not overstepped the bounds of duty, and gladdened her heart.

There were now plenty to share with her the task of nursing Fanny; but Fanny, with the caprice of illness, chose to have Katharine constantly with her, and, what was far more remarkable, she made frequent

inquiries, if Agatha did not appear in her room from time to time. She seemed to have some vague idea in her mind connected with Agatha's watching her the first night of her illness, and to look upon her, in some sort, as a help and guide to Katharine.

Agatha, on her part, was not slow in offering what assistance she could. So far as the practical part of nursing was concerned, she was superior to Katharine; she had had more experience, and was, in fact, quite in her element in a sick room. But if Katharine was less skilful in arranging pillows, and in making gruel and barley-water palatable, she was pleasanter to look at, and her cheerful voice was more refreshing to the ear, so that, between the two, never was little invalid more efficiently and tenderly nursed than Fanny was.

The attack was, as Dr. Selby had said, a pretty sharp one, but the crisis passed in safety. By this time, however, others in the family had been attacked, and the fever appeared to be going through the household.

Caroline was the next sufferer; and then two of the maids, one of them our old friend Hannah, fell ill; and afterwards Mrs. Rivers, who, though fearing for others, had never feared at all for herself, and who had, in fact, only considered the complaint in connection with children and young people, had a slight attack. Mr. Rivers and Henry escaped: Charles was not living at home, as for the last year

he had been an inmate of the Grange, where he was learning farming; and Willie, too, had been sent there as soon as Grace and Rosa had departed to their homes.

Though happily none of the cases were dangerous, yet so many sick people in the household caused plenty of work for those who were well, and Agatha and Katharine had abundance of work on their hands. Every one—the invalids themselves, Dr. Selby, casual visitors who were not afraid to approach the house—seemed astonished at Agatha's activity and usefulness. She was leading quite a new life: no longer self-absorbed and absent, she had thought and attention for all. Even Katharine, willing and devoted as she was, must yield the palm to Agatha, who was, indeed, most eager to spare her every kind of trouble.

Katharine, when she had time to think, was lost in wonder: Agatha was so careful of her comfort, yet so apparently careless of her regard.

Up and down stairs, day and night, Agatha toiled; no kind of work came amiss to her. Now cooking delicate broths over the kitchen fire, an accomplishment she had learnt from the housekeeper at Grey-more; nay, actually, during the illness of the cook, superintending the preparation of the family dinner; now, upstairs, armed with duster and broom, performing the duties of a housemaid, which might perhaps have been neglected in the inefficient state of

the establishment; now, administering medicines to the invalids, or tempting them with the delicacies she had prepared; everywhere was Agatha busy and at home. She was, in truth, notwithstanding the secret which always more or less oppressed her, happier than she had been for a long time, because her powers were being exercised. She had naturally a turn for nursing, and possessed many of the qualities useful in a sick-room. Mr. Rivers said, jokingly, that they were only just beginning to find her out; and Henry declared that when all at home were well she would be wanting to join Miss Nightingale's force; for this was the year of Crimean strife, and Miss Nightingale's name had become a household word.

Agatha smiled vaguely, but the idea was not without suggestiveness to her. She had a feeling that a mission of the kind would suit her powers; a half-developed scheme of giving herself up to a life of self-denying exertion; perhaps an unacknowledged thought of making some atonement by one kind of duties rigorously fulfilled, for her failure in another.

Is this strange in one brought up in a full knowledge of the grand principles of religion?

It may be so, but do we not know how many feelings lie lurking in our hearts, and mingle with our better motives, from which we should shrink if they were exposed before us.

Had an idea of this kind been placed before Aga-



tha in so many words, she would have been shocked, and perhaps have angrily denied that she had ever entertained it, and yet there it lay amongst her other motives whenever she contemplated the possibility of carrying out Henry's suggestion.

Other duties, however, and another fate, awaited Agatha.

Katharine, meantime, though less experienced, was hardly less useful than her sister; her qualities came into fuller play when the invalids had reached the stage of convalescence: she could amuse, whereas Agatha could only benefit. In many little things, the difference was plainly seen and felt between the two, originating, perhaps, in this fact, that Agatha could sympathise more, or better express sympathy, with pain and suffering, and Katharine with joy and happiness.

As soon as Fanny began to recover, Katharine's cheerful, pleasant ways made her fancy herself better than she really was, and made her enjoy with double zest her seat by the open window, with the sweet air blowing upon her from the garden, and the tranquil landscape stretched before her.

Agatha, on the contrary, had greater success than Katharine by the bedside of poor Hannah, who had the fever more severely than any of the others, and who was attended by Agatha with the care and tenderness of a sister.

"Call Miss Marchmont proud!" said Hannah,

afterwards, to her mother. "No ; she, for one, would never call her proud ; she had waited upon her as if she had been the greatest lady of the land, and she had been so gentle ; instead of stepping about in her grand way, like a queen, she had been quite humble-like, and spoken as softly as——" Hannah's powers of comparison failed, but she never forgot, in after days, the impression made upon her by Agatha during that illness.

And she was right in one sense about Agatha's pride : she had no pride as regarded her inferiors, that is to say, those who are called "the poor," though her natural haughtiness of manner might tinge her treatment even of them, when her compassion was not thoroughly roused ; but her pride of intellect, pride of moral strength, and pride of ancient descent, could never bring her into collision with them : it was towards others, who pretended to distinction themselves, or who undervalued her claims to it, that Agatha really felt and showed herself proud.

In no one point was the difference between Agatha and Katharine more apparent than in the way they each spent the time which, at the express desire of Mrs. Rivers, they passed out of the house every day.

Agatha generally chose the most solitary walks in the fields and woods, lost in her own reveries, and scarcely noticing anything around her ; seldom even stopping to gather a flower, but pacing rapidly on,

until she had accomplished the distance proposed to herself, and then returning to her home duties with renewed vigour indeed, but without having gained any ideas to communicate to those who were shut up within the house.

Katharine, on the contrary, usually walked to Fairfield. Sometimes when there she had a short gossip with cousin Bessy, from whom she collected a store of news, stupid enough, perhaps, intrinsically, but still sufficiently amusing when retailed by her to those who were somewhat wearied with their monotonous existence. Sometimes she did the shopping required by the household, and returned with astonishing accounts of new ribbons at Pearson's, or lately received Berlin patterns at Miss Green's, or she brought home a new magazine which she had captured before the proper time, by bribery and corruption, from the boy at the library. In short, in various trifling ways, she managed to make the time of her absence furnish future entertainment for those at home; and this, be it understood, from no exalted views of doing her duty. She had naturally a disposition to give pleasure, and what would have been highly meritorious conduct in Agatha, was in her scarcely deserving of praise. There were cases, indeed, in which she might be deemed truly selfish; days on which she was inclined to brood over her own individual sorrows; but then she cast them aside and behaved with her

customary cheerfulness, and, in entertaining others, lost care of herself. The day when Fanny was at length to go downstairs to tea, was hailed with pleasure by both her nurses. Agatha had become considerably attached to Fanny when she was ill and suffering, and she also felt somewhat soothed by the conviction that Fanny was loving her more than she had done before.

She had hitherto been rather afraid of her grave elder sister, but now she was in some way attracted towards her by feeling that she was fond of Katharine. From her quiet little bed, she had observed many things of which Katharine was unconscious, and had learnt to trace the affection which was so carefully concealed from the object of it under a cold exterior. Why this was done she did not know, and scarcely tried to guess, but the belief that Agatha loved Katharine formed a species of union between Agatha and herself.

Fanny, being a little tyrannical, and in that stage of recovery when every one gave way to her, had insisted upon drinking tea in the schoolroom the first day she went downstairs, and also that she should be mistress of the ceremonies, and Agatha, and Katharine, and papa, if he would agree to it, should be her guests. Henry at this time generally dined at Fairfield with the James Thorpes, and did not come home till late, and Mrs. Rivers and Caroline were still upstairs, so they could not

be asked, but papa readily accepted his little daughter's invitation, and Katharine, fully entering into the spirit of the thing, proceeded to arrange the room in the most festive fashion, and took care that the tea-table should be furnished in the most tempting manner. The time had been when Agatha would have rather sneered at these preparations, but happily that phase of her existence was over. Another idea struck Fanny on the morning of the day, and, as usual, she was indulged. It would be very nice, she thought, if cousin Bessy would come and drink tea; she was the only person out of the house she had seen during her illness, and she had always been fond of cousin Bessy: would Katharine invite her?

Katharine agreed, of course; cousin Bessy was delighted to come, and presented herself at the appointed time.

The little study looked very bright, fresh, and pretty; the door into the garden was wide open, and the white muslin curtains waved gracefully in the summer breeze; a profusion of roses filled the vase in the centre of the tea-table, and fresh vine-leaves adorned the dishes of cake and fruit. Some gay cushions had been brought from the drawing-room for the solitary easy-chair which was given up to Fanny; all the lesson-books were put out of sight, and a few attractive-looking volumes took their places on Fanny's table; more roses decorated the

mantel-piece, and on the hearth stood two large jars filled with green branches, and a quantity of the common, but deliciously fragrant "Queen of the Meadow."

Fanny was quite enchanted with the sight of everything, after having been shut up in her own room for so many days; and when cousin Bessy arrived, she, too, was quite struck with the gay appearance of the room, which she rightly supposed to be the effect of Katharine's handiwork.

Fanny made the tea, and buttered for her papa the thin slices of brown toast which he preferred to the greater delicacies Katharine had provided, and she felt quite proud and pleased at hearing him say how glad he was, again to have his little handmaid about him.

Never surely was a more enjoyable repast! Fanny, with all the appetite of returning health, revelled in the delicious strawberries, and wondered who could have made such perfectly excellent tea-cakes. Cousin Bessy sipped her tea and opened her budget of news, to which the others listened with more or less satisfaction. The most important intelligence related to Henrietta Brooke's marriage: she had been at the Grange in the morning, and had seen a letter from Charlotte to Mrs. Thorpe, giving a full account of the wedding. It had been a grand affair, and Henrietta had made a magnificent bride. The presents she had received were expatiated upon;

the compliments that had been paid her; the devotion the bridegroom had displayed to her. Altogether, it seemed a more brilliant marriage had never taken place in the world.

“Of course she is satisfied,” concluded cousin Bessy; “but it makes me out of patience to hear of such things; the man is old enough to be her father. I call it throwing herself away, when a girl marries an old man, however rich he may be: what feelings can they have in common, I should like to know? Though really it might be thought, from Charlotte’s letter, that Henrietta would be envied by all the world. It made me angry to hear my cousin Thorpe talk as she did; those nieces of hers have made her think of nothing but money in marriage. I declare I could not bear to hear her compare Henrietta’s marriage with Hester’s, calling them both lucky girls, as if the two could be compared together!”

“The marriages, or the girls, Bessy?” inquired Mr. Rivers, smiling.

“Both, for that matter,” returned cousin Bessy, “though I meant the marriages. Henrietta, indeed! One cannot very well consider *her* a girl, though it comes natural to use the word; but she must be turned thirty if she is a day.”

“Well, even thirty is not so very old, surely,” said Mr. Rivers.

“Oh, no; it is much too young for an old man

like Mr. Johnson; for he is upwards of sixty, I hear; and I am not one of those who think girls of eighteen and nineteen are the fittest for wives; indeed, I think in most cases six or seven and twenty is soon enough to think of marrying."

The last words were chiefly directed towards Agatha, whose age cousin Bessy recollected must be verging upon seven and twenty. Agatha, however, was unconscious of any particular meaning; she had long ago considered herself too old to think of marriage, and lately she had not thought on the subject at all.

"I quite agree with you," said Mr. Rivers; "and it is particularly foolish for middle-aged and old men to look out for the youngest girls they can find, as they almost invariably do."

"That is what I always say," said cousin Bessy. "I am sure an elderly man would show much more wisdom in choosing some one near his own age, instead of a young, thoughtless girl, and have far more comfort, though, no doubt, it is pleasant to see a young creature skipping about a house, and making things look bright and merry, and I can forgive a man for fancying himself younger than he is, for people don't make fun of his age as they do of a woman's."

"Well, perhaps some of these days we shall find you an elderly husband, Bessy, to carry out your theory," said Mr. Rivers, laughing.



“ Oh, now you need not begin your joking with me, Mr. Rivers,” said cousin Bessy; “ my day is past, I know very well, though I will not answer for what I might have done some years ago. I never speak against matrimony, though I am an old maid.”

“ Indeed, cousin Bessy, you are much too good for an old maid,” said Fanny; “ and we know, don’t we, Katharine, who walks so often past cousin Bessy’s window?” And thereupon ensued some harmless banter, to which cousin Bessy listened not ill-pleased, though she knew as well as the girls themselves did that there was not the least foundation for it. But there was a degree of pleasure in renewing, as it were, for a transient moment the feelings of youth, which, though it might be considered frivolous by a strong-minded person, surely might be pardoned in one who had in actual youth so rarely enjoyed the delight of having her attractiveness acknowledged, and who had passed through her whole existence so little embittered by neglect, so little envious of others.

Agatha thought the conversation was becoming rather foolish, but she did not shut herself up in disgust as she would formerly have done.

Soon after tea Mr. Rivers withdrew, and the rest of the party sat round the open doorway looking into the garden. Katharine was on the steps; she complained of the heat, and pushed back her hair

from her face ; and Agatha noticed that she looked pale and weary, and supported her head upon her hand, but she talked and laughed much as usual.

Cousin Bessy was telling some wonderful story of an old woman who had received a mysterious warning respecting the death of her absent son, when an interruption occurred. A servant entered with a magazine which had been sent from the book-club.

“Oh, it is the one I asked for yesterday,” exclaimed Katharine. “Mamma wanted to see the continuation of *Zaidee*,—such a pretty story, cousin Bessy ! I must collect the numbers for you, some day. Fanny, I must leave your charming party for a few minutes to take this to mamma ; she will be able to read it before it gets dark.”

And Katharine rose from her lowly position on the steps, and passed through the room with her usual rapid walk.

“Katharine is in very good spirits,” remarked cousin Bessy, “but it strikes me she does not look very well.”

“Do you notice it ?” said Agatha, earnestly ; “I thought it might be my fancy.”

“Katharine’s head ached this afternoon,” said Fanny, “but I thought it was better now.”

“She has often had headaches lately,” said Agatha ; “perhaps she has been exerting herself

too much. Do you really think she looks ill, Miss Thorpe?"

"Suppose poor Katharine should get the scarlet fever, after all," interrupted Fanny, in consternation.

"Oh, she does not look like that," said cousin Bessy; "she seems more weak and tired than as if she had any regular illness coming on; you must all take care of her. It is far worse, my dears, you know, for a young person to get out of health than just to take a complaint which is going about."

"But you do not consider Katharine delicate, do you?" asked Agatha, rather anxiously.

"No, my dear Miss Agatha; she always has been very well so far; but, you know, when people have anything on their minds, and go on from year to year — I don't know what I was going to say exactly, and—and——" Here cousin Bessy nodded her head a good many times, looking towards Fanny, evidently meaning that further conversation on this subject was indiscreet at present. Agatha perfectly understood her, and so, be it remarked, did Fanny, which was more than cousin Bessy intended.

Katharine's entrance effectually stopped the discussion; she again seated herself on the steps, leaning her head against the framework of the door. Agatha looked at her with an expression of anxiety, but did not speak. Cousin Bessy, however, asked if she had a headache.

“Yes; a slight one,” said Katharine; “but it is going away, I think, now. Pray finish that story you were telling us, cousin Bessy;” and cousin Bessy, not being able to recollect at what point she left off, began again at the beginning.

So they sat talking of various things, ghostly and real, till Katharine declared it was time for Fanny to go to bed. Cousin Bessy rose to go at the same time, for she had to walk home alone, as, although Phœbe had recovered, and returned to her duties, she had not liked to give her the trouble of walking to meet her, late in the evening.

Agatha, however, volunteered to accompany her part of the way, and retired to put on her bonnet. Cousin Bessy, in her walking costume, was waiting alone in the schoolroom when she returned, Katharine having taken Fanny away.

The walk through the dewy, hay-scented fields was very pleasant; and cousin Bessy chatted away quite freely now, even with Agatha, so that some time passed before the latter was able to introduce a topic of her own,—a topic which had been the chief cause of her offering to walk this evening. She said at last,—

“You were speaking rather mysteriously about Katharine just now: do you suppose that she has anything to make her unhappy, so as to influence her health?”

“Oh, my dear Miss Agatha, you take one up so,”

returned cousin Bessy. "I never said, nor meant to say that Katharine was unhappy; she is always in very good spirits, I am sure."

"But you certainly implied something of the kind," persisted Agatha.

"Well, my dear," said cousin Bessy, confidentially, "I really don't think that she has ever quite forgotten that gentlemanly-looking Mr. Wentworth, and no wonder, for no one at all equal to him has been here since, except Mr. Merivale, and he always belonged to Hester; and he certainly did pay her a great deal of attention, from all I can hear, for I never had many opportunities of seeing them together. And I know what it is; when one is only eighteen or nineteen, and first begins to think about any one, it is not so easy to forget. How it is that he never came back I can never understand, for I don't think Katharine would have liked a person who could behave in a heartless way, though Mrs. James Thorpe always did insist that he was one of those fickle, flirting people, here to-day and gone to-morrow, you could not depend upon. However, that does not signify; whatever he was, Katharine liked him, and likes him still, I firmly believe; and I can tell you, my dear, yes, and from experience too, that it is weary, dreary work waiting for one knows not what."

"But Katharine is naturally a light-hearted person," said Agatha, as indifferently as she could.

“Yes; that is just where it is; she does not mope and go melancholy, and so nobody suspects that she cares. But I can assure you light-hearted people can feel, and though they may go on hoping and being cheery, there are times when they sink. You may depend upon it, this kind of thing tells upon a person’s health at one time or another, and that is what I mean when I say that Katharine is not so strong as she used to be.”

“You seem to have watched her closely,” said Agatha; “more closely than I should have suspected.”

“I have known her from a child,” said cousin Bessy; “besides, I am always interested in young people’s love affairs, though my cousin Thorpe tells me sometimes it is quite foolish in me.”

“I suppose Mrs. Thorpe’s faith in love-sorrows is less firm than yours,” said Agatha.

“Oh, she is all matter-of-fact, and has forgotten her own young days, I tell her,” said cousin Bessy; “besides, they were easy enough to her: she married Richard Thorpe when she was quite young, and every one was agreeable about it, and she had never cared for any one else. I don’t believe she half knows what love is.”

Agatha smiled a little.

“You agree with Shakspeare, that the course of *true* love never did run smooth.”

“Ah, there’s truth in that,” said cousin Bessy. “I

can't explain what I mean, but I have a feeling that trouble of that kind is good for people, and brings out what they really are. I know some old wise-acres would blame me for talking to a young person in this way, but at any rate you are not one to be harmed by it."

"Why?" asked Agatha, more amused and curious than usual.

"Oh, Miss Marchmont, you know very well. You are far cleverer than I am, and your notions are more fixed than most young people's; and you are not at all romantic, and nothing that I could say would make you so. Still, even you need not be too sure; your time may come yet, and you may have more belief in love and trouble than you have now."

"My belief in trouble does not need strengthening," said Agatha, half to herself.

"But not the trouble that I mean," said cousin Bessy. "I believe you don't think you could ever care enough about any one to be unhappy about them, or to do a foolish thing on their account."

"I cannot undertake to discuss the question," said Agatha, in a colder tone than she had been using. Cousin Bessy had unwittingly touched upon a sore point. How little she guessed what Agatha had done, influenced by what she called love! The rest of the walk passed in comparative silence.

When Agatha returned home, she found that

Katharine had gone to bed, a proof that she was really tired and ill, which was far from lessening her uneasiness.

She could not help owning that there might be some truth in cousin Bessy's suppositions. Katharine might not be so strong as she professed to be; it was possible that a secret anxiety, or at any rate a deferred hope, might in some degree have undermined the springs of her health; how guilty then must that person be, who, having the power of lessening her anxiety, had suffered it to grow unchecked through months and years!

Agatha had begun by imagining Katharine devoid of strong feeling; she now rushed to the opposite extreme, and pictured to herself Katharine sinking into depression and serious illness, perhaps hopeless weakness and despair, from the effects of disappointed love!

Why then did she not gladden Katharine's heart by an avowal of the truth?

Partly from the old causes, partly also because her ideas were exaggerated, and the fears for Katharine's health and happiness, which during the night were so vividly felt, vanished into comparative insignificance before the cool light of morning. Not that they were entirely set at rest; Katharine was evidently far from well, but still mental anxiety might have no share in causing her illness; if a secret grief had power to weaken health, surely Agatha herself would



have suffered before now. So she reasoned, but still resolved that if time should prove that Katharine really was in sorrow and uneasiness, and if she really became seriously ill, then, casting aside all thought of self, and at the risk of losing all esteem and confidence, she would deliver the long-kept letter, and relate its history.

## CHAPTER II.

## WAVERINGS.

THE intense eagerness with which Agatha observed anything that concerned Katharine, might in the ordinary state of the household have excited attention, but at present no one noticed it as remarkable except Katharine herself, who was gradually becoming very much perplexed by Agatha's behaviour.

The morning after Fanny's tea-party, she contrived that Dr. Selby should see and prescribe for Katharine, and she afterwards waylaid him in the passage to ask his opinion.

"I suppose you don't think Katharine is going to have scarlet fever?" she commenced.

"No; you need not anticipate another patient to nurse," said Dr. Selby.

"But Katharine is not at all well, I am afraid?" said Agatha, in an inquiring tone.

"A little weak and overdone," said Dr. Selby. "I do not fear anything more than a few days' slight illness for her. I dare say she will soon be well; just now, she has a little low fever upon her, but

nothing extraordinary considering how she has been exerting herself. You know you have both of you been a great deal more active and useful than there was any occasion for. If people will devote themselves to nursing the sick, and doing the work of the whole household, in such an eager, excited fashion, they must expect to pay for it. I suppose as soon as Miss Rivers gets well, we shall have you on our hands."

"Oh, I am very strong," said Agatha, "and I really have done nothing more than I can very well bear; but Katharine, I fear, is different. Do you consider her delicate, Dr. Selby?"

"I can scarcely answer your question. She has never had any illness that I can remember, and how she might bear up under a serious one, I do not know. But my impression is, that she is not very strong, and requires care. But you need not look alarmed. I positively declare that her present illness is very slight."

"But if she has low fever, and is not strong, it may be long before she quite recovers," said Agatha: "low fevers are so tedious."

"Where did you acquire your medical knowledge, I wonder," said Dr. Selby, laughing.

"Do not laugh at me, please, Dr. Selby," said Agatha; "I am very much in earnest. I am afraid that Katharine is less strong than she thinks herself, and I want you to tell me your opinion *exactly*, from

time to time, not merely of this illness, but of her general strength."

Agatha spoke with a simplicity and pleading eagerness that forced Dr. Selby to answer her seriously, and he gave the promise she required, marvelling a little, as he left the house, at the change which had come over her.

Like most people, he had thought her cold-hearted, yet she was now showing an anxiety and a watchful affection about Katharine not less intense than even Mrs. Rivers could have displayed. He had never remarked any unusual attachment between the sisters; even of late, when they had been more thrown together, and he had seen much of them, he could not recall any demonstrations on Agatha's part at all in accordance with her present almost fidgety uneasiness about Katharine.

They had been on good terms certainly, but still not sisterly ones. There had been, he thought, a kind of tacit agreement between them of "you go your way; I go mine," very different from the true sympathetic intimacy which had marked the relation between Katharine and Hester, and with which this present exaggerated anxiety of Agatha, whom he believed to be a very strong-minded person, was strikingly inconsistent.

Dr. Selby, however, went his way, and, occupied with his own concerns, soon ceased speculating on the contradictions of Miss Marchmont's character;

but the impression that he had hitherto judged her wrongly, remained.

The course of events might seem to justify Agatha's gloomiest anticipations. Katharine did not recover so quickly as Dr. Selby had expected; the low fever, which had been considered a mere result of fatigue and excitement, proved lingering, and difficult to chase away; and after the rest of the family were restored to convalescence, she remained a prisoner to a sofa in her room, never perhaps actually ill, but still making no decided progress towards being actually well.

Agatha listened eagerly to the different remarks made by various persons upon Katharine, and hung with especial interest upon cousin Bessy's words, not because she deemed her particularly sagacious, but because she thought that she had watched and understood, through she knew not what unaccountable sympathy, something of the state of her feelings, and their possible effect upon her health and strength. Truly, that Agatha should listen to and watch for cousin Bessy's words, was not one of the least remarkable consequences that had followed the commission of her original, still unrepented because unacknowledged, fault. During all the time that had passed since she had told that wilful falsehood, every one of her actions had been more or less influenced by it.

One afternoon, when cousin Bessy had come to

drink tea at Hazel Bank, and had, of course, paid a visit to Katharine's room, Agatha joined her as she was going downstairs, and managed to direct her course towards the empty schoolroom, instead of to the drawing-room.

"Katharine is better to-day," she said. "Don't you think she looks stronger?"

"Yes," returned cousin Bessy; "but I don't like her continuing in this low way. It is a bad sign, as my cousin Thorpe said to me the other day, when a young girl, instead of catching an illness that is going about, falls ill of something else without any cause, as it seems. I must say I don't like it; it is not natural."

"But," said Agatha, "Katharine has been exerting herself a great deal, and it is a hot summer. Dr. Selby does not see anything unnatural in her illness, and every one is ill sometimes."

"But I don't like illnesses that come of themselves, for young people," said cousin Bessy; "and Katharine used to bear exertion well enough; besides, if that goes for much, I am sure you have had enough of it yourself, and yet I never saw you look better."

"I am no rule," said Agatha; "I believe the more I have to do, the better I am."

"So it ought to be with Katharine. Oh, no, depend upon it, my dear Miss Agatha, Katharine's mind is not at ease. You remember what I once said to you about it."

“She must feel the loss of Hester very much,” said Agatha, half musingly. “Perhaps——”

“Oh! the loss of Hester would not make her ill,” interrupted cousin Bessy. “Oh, no; I am afraid she has been moping and mourning in secret till she has injured her constitution. I declare Mrs. Thorpe made me quite frightened the other day, by asking me if I did not think Katharine looked very like my poor cousin, Hetty Thorpe, who went off in a consumption when she was young.”

“But Katharine has no tendency to consumption?” said Agatha, eagerly, a little startled, nevertheless.

“No, I hope not,” said cousin Bessy; “but one can never tell, and I wish she would get well.”

“I dare say a change would do her good,” said Agatha. “I wonder Dr. Selby does not order us all to go to the sea-side.”

“Very likely he will, by and by,” said cousin Bessy. “You would go, I suppose, to Scarcliff.”

“I don’t know,” said Agatha; “it has never been mentioned, but Scarcliff is scarcely the sort of place for us just now. I know of one that would exactly suit us, in my opinion, but all tastes might not be gratified.”

“Well, if I were you, and Dr. Selby does not propose it, I would put it into his head. Poor Katharine! I never knew her ill before, and it makes me quite melancholy to see her, and take hold of her hot, thin hand.”

“Her hands were always thin,” said Agatha.

“But not wasted and feverish,” said cousin Bessy. “Well, well, you may keep your own opinions about her, Miss Marchmont, but, for my part, I shall always think, though I would not say it to every one, that if Mr. Wentworth had never come to Coverdale, we should not have seen Katharine knocked up by a few weeks of exertion or excitement, or whatever you may call it.”

“It is as well not to say it to everybody, certainly,” said Agatha, gravely. “I do not think Katharine would like to have such a construction put upon her illness.”

“I have never breathed it to a creature but you,” said cousin Bessy; “quite the contrary. Whenever Mrs. James Thorpe has hinted to me, and she has done it pretty often, that Katharine was pining after Mr. Wentworth, or that she was silly in thinking of him, or that he had behaved badly, I have always contradicted her, and declared that neither of them meant anything but fun. Sophia, indeed!” exclaimed cousin Bessy, waxing wroth; “I was not going to listen to her constructions of what she knows nothing about, or to put up with the notion from her that Katharine was forlorn, or deserted, or to be pitied! I could not bear to have Katharine pitied by *her*, and to hear her set up her own sisters for models because they have been lucky enough to get husbands, all except Lucy, who does not wish, she



declares, to be married. Katharine might have been married before now, as I told her——”

But Agatha, finding the thread of the subject lost, and cousin Bessy evidently recurring to some recent skirmish which had taken place between herself and Mrs. James Thorpe, and having no interest in hearing the details of it, proposed going to the drawing-room, which they reached just as Fanny, now restored to all her old offices and duties, was leaving it to summon them to tea.

Agatha did not spend much time in the family circle that evening; she was restless and uneasy about Katharine. The words which she had pretended to slight had really made an impression upon her, and had confirmed her worst fears. She wondered that none of the others were alarmed about Katharine; even Mrs. Rivers showed no nervous fears, but appeared to find a satisfactory cause for her illness in her previous exertions: “the poor child had done so much, and wanted rest,” was the conclusion to which she always came; and with the remainder of the family it was the same thing. Agatha, in her own excited state of mind, was almost angry at their apathy, totally unaware that her own consciousness of having injured Katharine, and the pent-up nature of her own affection, gave an exaggerated hue to her impressions. Quite forgetting, also, that under other circumstances she would have considered cousin Bessy’s sentiments those of a

croaker, and unmindful of the fact that, though cousin Bessy was not naturally inclined to take a gloomy view of things, she was yet so much in the habit of talking a great deal about little incidents, and speculating upon causes, that trifles rapidly assumed with her an importance which did not belong to them in reality.

Later in the evening, Agatha was sitting in Katharine's room, or rather in the favourite old dressing-room which she now occupied in the daytime. It was a lovely night, after a hot, oppressive day, and Katharine was lying on a couch near the window enjoying the air, which, though so gentle as scarcely to stir the branches of the lilac-trees, felt deliciously fresh and cool. Agatha had stationed herself on a low stool a little farther within the room, but so placed that she could see every one of Katharine's movements, every expression that passed over her face.

There was no conversation between them, and Katharine seemed hardly conscious of Agatha's presence. Once or twice Agatha saw her eyes fill with large tears, which were slowly wiped away; she did not look unhappy, but there was a subdued, resigned expression about her face which struck Agatha's heart with a sharp pang.

How much this expression arose from physical weakness, how much from mental suffering, she could not determine; one thing only was certain:

Katharine was not what she used to be ; however successfully she might have concealed her feelings when she was strong and well, it was plain now that she had felt, and that sorrow was leaving its traces upon her.

Once more Agatha went over all the old arguments in her mind : should she, at last, deliver the letter ? but alas ! all her reasonings were founded on the effect it might have on Katharine, not on the simple duty which bound her to give it, without thinking of consequences.

On one side, to make Katharine happy and herself condemned and detested ; on the other, to let this wretched state of uncertainty continue : between these two thoughts did Agatha helplessly waver. One moment the desire to give Katharine happiness prevailed, and she determined to speak, and half moved forward to commence ; the next the dread of what Katharine might think of her, arrested her words.

And then false excuses, possibilities, conjectures, crowded upon her, and Agatha's mind, supposed by others, once believed by herself, to be so strong, sank into bewildered confusion.

After all, she considered, it might be a mere fancy that anything mental was causing, or increasing, Katharine's illness : perhaps the intelligence that Mr. Wentworth loved her would bring her no satisfaction, no joy. Nay, possibly the letter itself

might not be about anything so important ; it might simply contain a copy of verses, or a list of books, or something of the kind, that had been promised to Katharine ; perhaps she had throughout exaggerated its consequences. Nay, it might be, that her own feelings exaggerated everything, and that all her ideas had become morbid. But then, what had made her thus morbid ? Silence and reserve ; brooding over her own thoughts till they were no longer clear to her—till she had acquired a false estimate of all things, and needed to look through the medium of another's mind.

Oh, it was dreadful, torturing, to remain thus shut up in a prison of her own making ; seeing nothing, feeling nothing, but her own individuality, yet longing to rush out of herself, in some wild, incomprehensible manner : she felt as if she should go mad, if she continued silent, and yet she could not speak.

Once she started impatiently from her seat, and flung her arms forwards, towards the couch. Katharine turned round and caught a glimpse of the movement, but Agatha retreated in a moment, and sat down again calmly.

Katharine was bewildered, and did not know what to say.

“ Were you coming to sit on the couch, Agatha ? there is room for you if you like.”

“ No, thank you, I am comfortable here,” said Agatha ; “ but the evening is close, one feels restless.”

“I think the air is pleasant now,” said Katharine. “Come nearer the window and feel it; and indeed, Agatha, there is no occasion for you to stay here, I do not want anything. I dare say you would find walking in the garden refreshing, after the hot day.”

“Do you want to get rid of me?” asked Agatha.

“No, certainly not; I only thought you would be tired, and that it was a pity to waste a lovely evening like this in-doors.”

“I should not be better anywhere else,” said Agatha.

Something in her tone caused Katharine to look at her.

“What is the matter, Agatha? You speak strangely. Are you ill or unhappy?”

“No; it is you who are fanciful, Katharine,” returned Agatha. “I am the same as usual; you never have known me particularly merry; and if I seem gloomy, it is nothing new.”

“I did not say you were gloomy, but strange,” said Katharine. “However, I know it is useless asking you what is the matter; I know of old your objection to give confidence, and I never meant to ask you again.”

“My confidence, perhaps, would not much gratify you,” said Agatha; “and on my own account, you know me as well as I wish to be known.”

“I am sorry for it,” said Katharine; “for though every one says you are so much more open and

frank than you used to be, I still feel that I know you very little; and indeed, Agatha, I am convinced that if I knew you better, I should like you still more than I do now."

"No, you would not; and perhaps you are wrong in liking me at all; I do not deserve it."

"We should none of us deserve to be liked, perhaps," said Katharine, "if we were known exactly as we are; but it is false humility in you, I think, to imagine that a little closer acquaintance would destroy your claim to be liked. There is a great difference between the kind of knowledge I mean, and the being aware of all the secret movements of the heart, which perhaps no human being could exactly understand in another. What I complain of is, that you tell nothing; one must go completely by guess-work; and yet, Agatha, I am sure there is much in you to like."

"If you can think so, I am grateful to you," said Agatha. "Let us remain exactly as we are."

"If you liked me as well as I like you, you would not say so."

"Should I not?" said Agatha. She seemed about to add something else, but stopped abruptly, and drew still farther back.

Katharine waited for some time, expecting a more satisfactory reply than the three words she had heard; then, finding Agatha remained silent, she turned her face again towards the window, saying to

herself once more that it was folly and waste of words to attempt to be on anything like a confidential footing with Agatha.

But the conclusion was more painful than it had ever been before; Katharine really believed that there was much to like in Agatha, and the light in which she had lately appeared had been so favourable, and shown in her so many good qualities; and she herself sadly needed a companion.

Hester's loss made itself daily more felt, and just now, weakened and depressed by illness, she longed for intercourse with a congenial mind. Caroline was too little intellectual, and Fanny too young, to supply in any degree Hester's place, but Agatha might, she was convinced, have done much towards it, if she would.

A little pique mingled with her annoyance; she was accustomed to be liked, and in this instance it seemed that all her efforts were repulsed with indifference, and that she had made no progress towards gaining Agatha's affection.

The silent meditations of the sisters were interrupted by the entrance of Fanny.

"Agatha, mamma said I was to tell you it was supper-time," she said; "and see, Katharine, I have brought something nice for you."

"Come here, darling," said Katharine. "What have you been doing with yourself all the evening?"

“I will tell you directly; only wait a minute till I bring the little stand nearer to you.”

Agatha started up, and moved the creaking little table, which was too heavy for Fanny, and placed the tray upon it. Then she turned to the couch to see if Katharine required anything more, and, having at last arranged the cushions to her satisfaction, she said to Fanny, who had placed herself at the foot of the couch, and was clearing away the heaped-up books and magazines, which had furnished Katharine's entertainment during the day,—

“Now we may as well go downstairs, Fanny; Katharine has all she requires, I think.”

“I am not going down any more to-night,” said Fanny; “it will be my bedtime directly, and I am going to have my supper here with Katharine. Now, Katy, darling, what do you think I have to tell you?”

Agatha did not wait to hear more.

“I will go down, then,” she said; “you will not want me any more. Good night, Katharine;” and she went up to her and kissed her forehead,—a cold, conventional kiss.

Any one who had observed her closely, would have seen that she lingered a moment or two in the room, and cast an attentive glance on all its arrangements; partly closed the window, which was admitting too much of the now dewy evening air,



threw away some withered flowers, and, in short, performed various little offices for Katharine's comfort, which would only have been found out by the eye of watchful affection.

Her last look towards the window showed her that Fanny was established close to Katharine, and she heard her say,—

“Now, Katharine, we are nice and cosy, I will tell you what we have been doing: we have all been talking over plans for going to the sea-side. We are really going; cousin Bessy mentioned it, and then papa said that Dr. Selby had spoken to him about it this morning, but he had forgotten it till now: won't it be glorious?”

Agatha went downstairs. A gnawing pain was at her heart: she was not exactly jealous of Fanny, and yet it grieved her to think that Katharine could never know that she loved her as well as Fanny did; nay, more deeply than a child of her age could possibly do.

The discussion about the sea-side visit was carried on at the supper-table; there seemed to be some difficulty in choosing a place. Caroline spoke loudly in favour of Scarcliff, but Mrs. Rivers did not consider it quiet enough.

Caroline brought forward the usual arguments: there was no occasion to be gay at Scarcliff; people might do as they liked; it was possible to ramble about the sands away from everybody else; no need

to dress, or walk on the promenade, or make acquaintances, or to join in the balls, &c. The sea and the air were as good at Scarcliff as anywhere else.

“True, Caroline,” said Mrs. Rivers; “there is no occasion to enter into any of the things you have mentioned, but I am perfectly sure that if you were at a place where balls and picnics were the order of the day and night, you would never rest until you had dragged your mother into letting you join them; and if you once commenced the system, you would, none of you, have a moment to yourselves. I know how it was when you were at Scarcliff the year before last, and, though it was all well enough then, at present a quieter kind of life is desirable. Dr. Selby especially said some quiet sea-bathing place, where you could all be out of doors exactly how and when you liked, and have perfect rest and freedom from excitement.”

“I am sure, as far as I am concerned,” said Caroline, “a little excitement would do me good.”

Her father smiled.

“Perhaps; but you are not the only person, and not the most important. Your mother has had a good deal of worry about one thing or other, and Katharine has evidently been over fatigued and over excited; and I think, if you put yourself altogether out of the question, you will see that the life you would lead at Scarcliff would not be suitable. Katharine, though just now she is subdued enough, is not the

sort of girl to see people enjoying themselves without making a struggle to join them ; no sooner would she get a little stronger than you would begin a regular racket between you. I see it clearly, so not a word more of Scarcliff."

"There is Sandstowe," said Mrs. Rivers ; "that would not be too gay for us, and you all used to be very happy there when you were children : we might go there."

"Oh, mamma, it is spoilt by excursion trains!" exclaimed Caroline. "I am sure you would not find quiet there. Don't you remember, Henry, the account Mr. Fenton gave us of it one day ? about the black, grimy-looking manufacturing people rushing down from the train straight to the sea, and how the regular visitors could not find a spot on the sands free from them, and there was not a loaf of bread to be had in the place, they caused such a famine. Indeed, mamma, the excursion trains have spoilt Sandstowe."

"I don't very clearly see how excursion trains can spoil a place," said Mr. Rivers, "provided you had laid in a sufficient store of bread before their arrival. If Katharine were here, she would enter into an argument with you on the subject ; however, at present I agree that they would not add to your comfort. We must think of some other quiet place : who can suggest one ?"

"I know of one," said Agatha ; "but I do not

think you will all approve of it. In my opinion, it is very beautiful as well as very quiet ; you have seen it, I dare say, papa, for it is only a few miles from Greymore."

"You mean Brackencliff, that little fishing village, I suppose," said Mr. Rivers ; "but are you sure of getting accommodation for such a party ? I do not remember anything but fishermen's cottages."

"There are some lodging-houses now," said Agatha, "though it is too out-of-the-way a place to be much frequented. I dare say there would be no difficulty about getting a house ; but, as it is five years since I was there, it may be changed."

"We might ask Philip to make inquiries," said Mrs. Rivers.

"I am writing to him," said Agatha ; "I can ask him."

"Do so," said Mr. Rivers ; "and when we hear his account, we can determine. It appears to me a likely place, and you would see some fine country, and could make some little excursions. You would enjoy the wild scenery," he added, turning to his wife.

"Yes ; very much, I am sure," answered Mrs. Rivers ; "and Agatha would like to be near Greymore again, and we should all have pleasure in seeing it."

"And I should come over, of course," pursued Mr. Rivers ; "and then I could look after your affairs

a little, Agatha, and see how Philip is getting on. It is altogether a good scheme; even you, Caroline, will get reconciled to it."

"Oh! I would rather go to a wild place like that," said Caroline, "than to a half-and-half one like Sandstowe."

"There is some good salmon-fishing in the river, Philip says," remarked Henry. "I should like a few days there very well myself."

"Well, we must thank Agatha for the suggestion, I think," said Mrs. Rivers.

"Scarcely," returned Agatha; "for a selfish wish to see Greymore again may have influenced me, perhaps."

"Always the same, Agatha," said Mr. Rivers, in a light tone; "refusing the praise which is your due. But we all know that you might see Greymore if you liked, without taking us to Brackencliff."

Agatha's face slightly flushed; she could not bear even the least mark of approval now: how differently they would think of her if they rightly knew her! And yet, in this instance, she had not been recommending Brackencliff from a selfish motive; she dreaded almost as much as she wished to see Greymore again.

## CHAPTER III.

## A VISIT TO GREYMORE.

BRACKENCLIFF was, in truth, little more than a fishing hamlet; but its situation, in one of the most romantic districts of the north of England, and on one of the boldest parts of the coast, would have been enough to make it famous, had it been discovered by any one of sufficient influence to turn the tide of fashion in its favour. But such was not the case, and Brackencliff preserved a degree of primitive simplicity rarely found in these railway times.

A few of the minor gentry of the county sometimes frequented it, and the tradesmen's wives of the neighbouring towns occasionally brought their children for a week or two to enjoy the advantages of sea-air and sea-bathing, with less expense than usually attends a sojourn at a watering-place. Now and then, too, a rambling tourist or artist penetrated its obscurity and found employment amongst its beauties; nay, one or two pictures of the neighbouring coast had found their way into the Water Colour Exhibitions; had always been admired, and greeted

with the exclamation of, "Brackencliff! where in the world is such a place?" but no one had cared to find an answer to the question.

The village consisted of a rather long, straggling street, consisting chiefly of fishermen's huts, one or two small miscellaneous shops, and a few newer buildings of more pretensions, which were let as lodgings.

A tolerable, though not very large hotel stood at one extremity of the street, and on the highest part of the rocky platform on which the village was built. At this end the cliff was steep, and steps cut in the rock led down to the sands; the other sloped more gradually, and a little beyond the houses, the rock terminated, and gave place to a series of undulating sand-banks, partially covered with short herbage, but in most directions presenting only a waste of red sand.

Extending inland, from these sandy elevations rose the chain of low, iron-impregnated hills, which partially encircled Greymore. A less regular and much loftier range of mountains reared their summits in the opposite direction, and, as they vanished in the blue distance farther northwards, were blended with the cliffs that bounded the coast.

The country between the two chains of hills did not form one simple valley; it consisted partly of an elevated stretch of moorland, partly of a series of comparatively fertile dells, separated by barren or

fir-covered ridges, branching off from the main hill-ranges. Through the largest of these flowed a broad stream, which gradually wound its way amongst the hills, till it entered the sea between the sloping sand-banks. Farther up the valley its course was barred and narrowed by projecting masses of rock, till it almost formed a torrent. This spot was within the domains of Greymore, and had in former days been one of Agatha's favourite haunts.

Greymore Priory itself could be distinctly seen, on a clear day, from the higher end of Brackencliff, and it may be supposed was one of the first objects of attention to the Hazel Bank party when they arrived there.

The inquiries, which Philip had made with energy, respecting accommodation at Brackencliff, had proved satisfactory, and about a fortnight after the conversation related in the last chapter, the family had moved there, that is to say, the female portion of it, for Mr. Rivers had been unable to do more than convey his wife and children there, and Henry could not leave the office just then. Willie was the only protector of the party, and doubtless considered himself a very efficient one.

The house in which they were established was at the higher end of the street; it was not large, but they had it entirely to themselves, the old couple who owned it inhabiting a cottage at the end of the enclosure of coarse sea-side grass, called by courtesy a



garden. A few inconveniences attended a residence in so primitive a place, but they were looked upon as rather amusing than annoying, and the bracing air and perfect change soon appeared to have a beneficial effect upon all.

Katharine rapidly improved in health and appearance almost from the moment of leaving home, and Agatha, though she still watched her with earnest care, was inclined to wonder at herself for her former uneasiness, and gloomy prognostications.

She began to believe with the rest that Katharine's illness had proceeded from fatigue and extra confinement to the house, and that mental anxiety had not had any share in predisposing her to it. Therefore, although her conscience was seldom at ease respecting her secret, the pressing need of disclosing it could be cast aside, and she could more easily endeavour to forget it amidst the engagements of the present. And yet, much bitterness mingled with Agatha's feelings on beholding again the scenes she had so dearly loved; it was not merely the gentle melancholy that might naturally be expected to rise within her, on revisiting the spots hallowed by so many fond, sad memories; but another sensation, a hundred times more difficult to bear—a conviction that she herself was changed; that the Agatha Marchmont, who had here been esteemed and cherished, no longer existed; that her lofty spirit had stooped to mean deceit; that she could no longer proudly raise

her head in the halls of her ancestors, and claim kinship with them through nobility of mind and honourable feeling as well as through the rights of blood ; that she was no longer worthy to bear the Marchmont name ; and that they, its last possessors, the guardians of her childhood, had they still existed, could no longer have loved her, knowing her as she now was, or, that if their love still endured, it must have been tinged with shame for her, and regret for themselves.

Before the Hazel Bank party had been many days at Brackencliff, a visit to Greymore was arranged. Philip planned it with eagerness, and rarely missed riding over during the day to urge its accomplishment.

At first there had been a few difficulties in the way. Mrs. Rivers wished Katharine to be rather stronger before she ventured upon any excursions ; afterwards, the mode of conveyance required some consideration, for though the distance was not beyond the walking powers of any of the party when in full strength, such an exertion was not to be thought of at present.

But all obstacles were happily surmounted, and on a soft cloudy morning in August, the whole party started on their expedition. Philip had a dog-cart, in which he drove Agatha, the back seat being occupied by Hannah, and further filled up by the indispensable hamper of provisions.

The others, with the exception of Willie, who rode a shaggy little pony lent by Philip, were conveyed in a kind of jaunting car hired from the hotel. It was not a very elegant vehicle, but was greatly esteemed at Brackencliff, where it had done duty for excursionists during many summers.

The scenery, as the way led farther inland, became more picturesque, or at least more varied; the steep cliffs were left behind: on one side, the prospect embraced the wide tract of moors; on the other, a more cultivated landscape, broken up by jagged hills and patches of forest; whilst beyond rose the mountain peaks, piled above one another till they were lost in the misty distance, and their faint gray outlines were indistinctly seen against the still fainter gray of the sky.

The travellers in the car were all in their best spirits; this sort of country was new to them, and both Mrs. Rivers and Katharine were fitted by taste and feeling to enter fully into its beauties. Agatha's emotions may be imagined, from what has before been said: she was grave and silent, but Philip fancied he understood the cause of her demeanour, and respected it. He, too, was occupied with thoughts of his own, which would have made the utterance of commonplaces as distasteful to him as the listening to them would have been to her.

During the last weeks he had felt compelled to enter upon an examination of his feelings towards Agatha.

Since his last visit to the Grange he had been restless, and conscious of something wanting in his existence ; unaccountably anxious to receive letters from Agatha, and invariably disappointed when they arrived. The news that she was to visit Brackencliff had sent a thrill through him, such as he had believed he should never more experience. And yet, surely, he could not be in love with Agatha? He knew her faults, he condemned her pride, he rebelled against submitting to her influence, he thought her self-reliance unfeminine and unbecoming ; she was altogether far from reaching his ideal of woman. But, after all, what was that ideal of his? would it bear closely examining? might it not be a baseless vision of his boyish days, which, for the matured opinions and developed nature of the man, was only vague and unsatisfying? Katharine, who had appeared to embody that ideal, had disappointed him, but even if she had realized it, would he have loved her still?

Circumstances undoubtedly had done much towards forming his love for her. However attractive and amiable and loveable she might be, and Philip now accorded her full justice, he did not think she would have entirely suited him ; he thought she was deficient in concentrativeness ; he, like Agatha, could not understand how earnestness could be diffuse, as hers was, and yet *be* earnestness.

They neither of them exactly comprehended Ka-

tharine's true disposition, or knew that where her affections, not merely her tastes, were concerned, she was as earnest as they were, and perhaps more constant. But the question now did not relate to Katharine, but to Agatha. Did Philip love her or not? did her character harmonize truly with his? The latter query Philip did not attempt to answer; he was feeling too much to analyse deliberately Agatha's mind and heart, and he only attempted to decide what his own feelings were towards her.

At first it seemed absurd to think of being in love; he had imagined himself so completely beyond the danger of loving again: and besides, no one had ever appeared to think of love in connection with Agatha.

She was considered cold and hard, and it was generally supposed that she looked upon love as weakness; but Philip had never had this opinion of her himself; he had known intuitively, as it were, that she possessed strong feeling and great power of attachment; and, of late, as has been said, the more gentle, more affectionate, side of her character had been displayed to him through his connection with Grey-  
more.

When he had begun to think of her, he did not know; indeed, on recalling the early days of their acquaintance, he could not remember a time when he had not thought of her. Even when his heart had seemed most occupied with Katharine, he had never

looked upon Agatha with the indifference which he accorded to young ladies in general ; for him she had always had an individual existence, and not been blended with the common feminine world. Even when he had least liked her, he had had some comprehension of her, and her untameable, unattractive nature had seized upon him with a sort of tenacity. One might almost imagine that he had had a prophetic sense of what she was to become to him.

The night before the excursion to Greymore, Philip, on returning from Brackencliff, where he had spent the evening, had endeavoured to come to some conclusion respecting his sentiments and his future course of action, but his meditations ended in nothing more decisive than a resolution to watch Agatha narrowly during the day, and then to be guided by circumstances.

If he could not see any trace in her of feelings at all resembling his own, then he must try to check, and at all events avoid betraying them ; if, on the contrary, he could discern beneath her cold manner any glimmering of awakening attachment, he would use every effort to increase it ; and if Agatha *once* began to love, he knew that she would love with that intensity which would alone satisfy his own requirements.

That she had some liking for him many trifling things seemed to assure him : no vanity made him

draw this conclusion, but rather the penetrating glance of sympathy which could perceive Agatha as she really was, not as she appeared. He knew also that she would try not to like him, and would defy his power; but this conviction only roused within him a pleasant excitement and an unflinching determination to surmount all obstacles, if only the dormant spark he suspected had any existence in her breast.

It was strange, perhaps, that Philip, who in his love for Katharine had been so timid and hesitating, should now be so daring and determined; and yet it may not be altogether inexplicable: some natures can only be called into full play and action by the influence of corresponding ones; it is only with equals they can rise to contend. Philip could meet Agatha on equal ground, strength to strength, and will to will, and he knew that she could appreciate him for what he truly possessed; whilst with Katharine he had always felt himself deficient in the attractive qualities which would suit her taste.

The distance to Greymore was soon accomplished, and the little procession entered the park. The present inhabitants were away, so there was no risk of encountering them, and Agatha would be able to see her own house without having the fact thrust upon her that it was in the hands of strangers.

As they drove through the park Philip pointed

out, through a gap in the trees, the portion of the hills where the iron had been worked, but it was too distant for any apparatus to strike Agatha's eye unpleasantly. A row of sheds could be seen in which the workmen lived, and Philip, in answer to a question asked him from the car, which was just behind the dog-cart, indicated his own habitation. It was an old farmhouse, a good deal dilapidated, of which he occupied the upper portion, some of the workmen and the woman who "did for him" living in the lower part.

"You cannot be very comfortable there, I should think, Philip," said Caroline. "I wonder what aunt Thorpe would say if she saw you living in such a place."

"It is better inside than you would suppose," said Philip, "and the great point is to be near the works. If I should stay here altogether, and affairs go on well, it might be worth while to build a house; at present this does well enough for me."

There was a sombre, imposing appearance about the front of the old Priory, with its massive background of fir-covered slopes, which impressed the whole party. No one spoke much: Fanny, indeed, said in a low voice to her mother,—

"What a grand place to belong to Agatha! How funny it seems that she ever lived here!"

"I don't see anything so very funny about it," said Caroline; "it is much more funny that Hester



should be going to live at Somerford. I am sure the house there is a much handsomer one than this. Just look what poky little windows in the upper rooms."

"Yes," said Fanny; "but somehow this seems a grander place than Somerford; don't you think so, mamma?"

"It certainly strikes one more," said Mrs. Rivers. "No modern house can be made to look so *interesting* as an old one, however beautiful it may be."

"I don't wonder at Agatha's attachment to Grey-more now," said Katharine. "I am sure if I had been brought up here, all other spots in the world would have seemed poor and tame to me. What romances one can imagine at the sight of those gray old walls, and those thick, dark fir-woods!"

"I suppose it is too romantic for me," said Caroline; "and I believe you would soon tire of anything so gloomy yourself, Katharine."

"Perhaps I might; but now it seems everything that is delightful and suggestive. I wish you would not talk, Caroline, and spoil my visions."

Caroline laughed.

"It is something new to hear you speak in praise of antiquity, Katharine; I thought you prided yourself upon being modern, and considered no times so good as ours."

"Yes," said Katharine; "but still I feel there is a beauty in the past when it is brought before

me. Am I very inconsistent, mamma? May I not glory in present cultivation and progress, and yet have a little enthusiasm for the days of old?"

"I think your heart is capacious enough for both affections," said Mrs. Rivers. "I know you are not really inconsistent, Katharine, whatever you may appear to some people."

They had now nearly reached the house. The space before it was covered with smooth turf, scattered groups of evergreens arising in different directions, but no proper flower-garden being visible on this side of the building. A large yew hedge on one side screened off the stables and servants' offices; on the other, the turf sloped slightly downwards for a few hundred yards, when it was bounded by a ruined wall, in the middle of which rose a graceful pointed archway, a remnant of the old Priory. Other fragments of the edifice were dispersed beyond, and at some distance another wall, also decayed and ivy-covered, rested against the background of dark forest.

The surface in this direction was broken and uneven, and bushes of bilberry and wild juniper grew in tangled disorder, contrasting not unpleasantly with the quaint neatness of the lawn immediately about the mansion.

Standing on the steps and looking down the gentle elevation on which the Priory was built, the silver thread of the stream could be seen through the

bushes, and its windings amongst the fields and wild pasture-land could be traced. The swelling hills and distant mountain peaks closed the view on all sides but one, where the faint sea-line marked the horizon.

“How beautiful!” exclaimed Katharine, seizing in a fit of enthusiasm Agatha’s hand, as they stood together at the entrance of the house; but Agatha coldly withdrew it without returning the pressure. Katharine’s sympathy at such a moment was more than she could bear; it recalled so many things she would fain have forgotten, and brought before her, concentrated into one vision, all she had done and suffered at Hazel Bank; all her errors and all her shame.

Katharine was rather chilled; though often roused to enthusiasm, she was not indiscriminately demonstrative, and the impulse which had caused her movement was strong and sincere. Agatha *might* have known that it was no unmeaning, girlish rapture which had influenced her; however, it was only usual to be thus misunderstood, and she turned away to seek in her mother a more congenial spectator.

The arrival of the housekeeper, who opened the door, stopped further remarks. Mrs. Burnthwaite belonged to an almost extinct race of faithful servants; she had been born and bred under the shadow of the Marchmont wing, and had lived at the Priory,

in one capacity or other, ever since she could remember.

After the death of Mr. Marchmont she had intended to retire to a cottage in the village to live upon her savings, but she had been persuaded to enter the service of the new-comers by Agatha, who had represented to her that she should find some comfort and satisfaction in feeling that one of the old family dependants still remained about the house, to care for the ancestral pictures and other relics, which possibly might be neglected by strangers. It was chiefly the idea of preventing innovation, and of preserving all things in their original condition against the time when Miss Marchmont should again inhabit the seat of her forefathers, that induced the worthy old housekeeper to persevere in a mode of life that had become irksome to her.

A curious mixture of respect and fond affection marked her greeting of her young mistress, as she still considered Agatha; it was different from anything the Hazel Bank family had ever encountered, and they were struck with it accordingly.

It was nothing new to them to witness marks of attachment in inferiors; they had received such many times at home; but affection between themselves and old, valued servants had assumed a tinge of equality, of which not a trace was here visible. The formal courtesy and studied words which accompanied the tremulous joy of Mrs. Burnthwaite's tone,

and the agitated delight of her countenance, would, if addressed to themselves, have appeared to verge on the ridiculous, but to Agatha there seemed nothing novel in being thus treated.

They entered the hall, a large, square apartment, rather dark, and having a gallery round three sides of it, supported by pillars, between which passages branched off to other parts of the house. In some of these, figures could be discerned in the dim light. The old housekeeper explained the cause of their appearance:—

“Some of the former domestics had asked permission to come and pay their duty to Miss Marchmont, and they were waiting in the passages.”

Agatha went amongst them; a rich, deep colour suffused her cheek, and a rare moisture at once softened and brightened her dark eyes. Hazel Bank had vanished into dreamy obscurity, and Greymore in its old reality again stood before her.

Any one who had doubted her power of attachment would have doubted no longer now; she welcomed these friends of her childhood with an ardour which could not be mistaken, remembered all their names and their former offices, and inquired with warm interest about their present condition. Some were still connected with the house, in Mr. Maynard's service, but most of them were established in other places, and not a few had come that morning from far away farmhouses amongst the hills, to see

once more the last shoot from the ancient Marchmont stock.

“How did they know that I was coming to-day?” inquired Agatha, when the group had dispersed.

“Mr. Thorpe told me to spread the news,” replied the housekeeper; “he thought it would please you to see them.”

Agatha looked round for Philip; he was standing in one of the deep mullioned windows, apart from every one else; she just caught his eye, and then turned away again. Something confused her: it was evident that he had been watching her. Mrs. Rivers and the girls had been a little neglected during this scene; a few inquiring glances had been turned towards them, a few whispers had been exchanged amongst Agatha’s visitors.

“The second wife and her family,” had been the short, dignified answer of Mrs. Burnthwaite to all the questions addressed to her.

Very secondary people in Greymore estimation were this “second wife and her family,” yet it did not signify much to them; they had their proper value in their own place, and would not perhaps have changed their position and their friends for Agatha’s, though they felt compelled secretly to acknowledge, that this strength of hereditary respect was in its way a grand thing, and that much that was excellent in individual character must have

blended with old tradition to keep it so living and active.

Mrs. Burnthwaite now led the way to the other rooms; they were not very remarkable, all bearing the same character,—massive in architecture, solemn in effect, and quaint in detail.

There were not many of the valuable pictures and statues, and articles of *virtù*, that mark a show place, but the whole gave a general idea of grandeur and stateliness; and the furniture, though not magnificent, presented some specimens of antique carving and elaborate workmanship.

At the entrance of one of the rooms, Agatha's face assumed a graver look: Mrs. Burnthwaite saw it and hesitated.

“Open the door,” said Agatha; “let them see everything.”

The room was small, rather shabbily furnished, and, at first, seemed almost dark, the light from the window in the recess was so shadowed by the thick trees which grew outside. A writing-table stood in the middle of the room, near it an old-fashioned arm-chair covered with tarnished leather; oaken book-cases lined the walls on two sides, but contained few volumes; on the third hung a picture, having suspended, on one side of it, a sword with a richly ornamented scabbard, and on the other, a whip, a pair of spurs, and some other riding accoutrements.

“My grandfather's study,” said Agatha, in an

explanatory tone ; “ the ancestral study, I may call it, as it seems to have been generally preferred to the library for daily use,” she added, with some pride.

“ Dear me ! I should not have chosen this room myself,” said Caroline ; “ and there is no view from the window ; but whose portrait is that, and why does it not hang with the rest in the gallery ? ”

“ There is a history attached to that picture,” said Agatha, unheeding, in the full tide of awakened associations, anything that might have jarred upon her in Caroline’s tone ; “ that is the portrait of our—of *my* ancestor, Godfrey Marchmont, who distinguished himself in the Civil Wars. I don’t know the exact cause of its being placed here originally, and my grandfather used to speak of removing it to the gallery ; but we, my aunt Agatha and I, persuaded him to let it be here ; partly because we liked it to be apart from the rest, and partly because it so strongly resembled my grandfather himself, being much more like than any portrait that was ever taken of him, and it was a pleasure to us to compare him with it, as he sat there in his favourite chair.”

Agatha paused : sorrow for her individual loss mingled with her general pride in the Marchmont race. Presently, however, she continued, pain and reserve alike merged in the consideration of the glory of her ancestors :—

“ Godfrey Marchmont is one of the honours of our



family," she said. "I cannot tell you now half the traditions of his valiant deeds; he was a right true, noble cavalier, and his name may be met with in many old records of his times. The sword hanging by the portrait was his, and the scabbard did not originally belong to it, but was given to him at the Restoration by Charles the Second, in honour of his many services. I value that sword and that picture more than anything I have in the world, and so long as a Marchmont possesses Greymore they will never be separated, or moved from their places."

"And the riding whip and spurs?" said Caroline, taking advantage of Agatha's communicative mood.

"They belonged to the same person," said Agatha; and she proceeded to relate various circumstances connected with her ancestor,—the sort of legends which we read, perhaps, in musty old books without much interest, but which, when narrated in appropriate scenes, and by one who has full faith in what she utters, and who is descended from the hero whose praise she celebrates, have a much more animating effect upon us.

Agatha's enthusiasm astonished those who listened to her; they had never seen her so excited.

"What a fine fellow he must have been!" exclaimed Willie, whose attention had been captivated by what sounded so adventurous; "it is worth something to belong to such a brick."

Agatha looked at her young brother with leniency, and pardoned the unworthy epithet he applied to an ancestor and a Cavalier, on account of his hearty admiration.

“His honour was equal to his bravery,” she said; and she produced some striking examples of it.

“I can understand thinking a great deal about him,” said Caroline. “I don’t care so much for the Cavaliers now since I have read Macaulay, but still to have had such a man for one’s ancestor must make one feel proud; don’t you think so, mamma?”

“It must make one anxious to be worthy of being descended from him, and careful to do nothing to disgrace his memory,” said Mrs. Rivers. They were words of course, and she intended no personal application, but they struck painfully on Agatha’s conscience.

The glow which had been kindled by the consideration of her ancestor’s greatness died away from her features; what a contrast there was between the stainless truth and magnanimity she had just been describing, and her own low treachery!

“After all,” said Caroline, unaware of any change in Agatha, “what a fine set our forefathers must have been: really, I think we English have reason to triumph in our name when we look back to their deeds.”

“We have no reason to be ashamed of our name now,” said Katharine; “our deeds in the Crimea may

stand by the side of any of former days, and certainly deserve more praise than those that could be done in civil war: the motive for bravery must be larger and nobler, it seems to me, when all are fighting together as Englishmen, than when each was fighting for a party. I will not think we are less glorious in war than formerly."

"Or in peace," interrupted Philip. "Are our triumphs in that way to stand for nothing? Depend upon it there is much bravery and nobleness now engaged in battling against injustice, and prejudice, and falsehood, even in the midst of Manchester cottons."

"Yes, I believe it," said Katharine; "but don't talk about such things just now when one is in an enthusiasm about war and chivalry. You remind one unpleasantly of the Peace Association."

"I did not intend to allude to *it*," said Philip. "I only wanted to give peace its due."

Agatha had not attended to the last remarks; she had been reverently removing with her handkerchief some particles of dust from the scabbard. Then, suddenly, as if not wishing to stay any longer amongst these cherished relics, she proposed going into another room. All agreed; but Mrs. Rivers lingered a moment to take another look at the portrait.

"You resemble it, Agatha," she said. "Were you considered like your grandfather?"

“Yes, by some people, though I could never see it myself,” answered Agatha; “but if I resembled him, I must resemble this portrait, for it is exactly himself, allowing for the difference of costume and way of wearing the hair. . . And he would have acted in the same manner if he had been in the same circumstances, *I know*. The two are always inseparably associated in my mind. I do not deserve to be like either of them in feature,” she added, to herself, as she followed Mrs. Rivers into the passage.

Mrs. Burnthwaite opened next the door of a long, rather narrow apartment, which ran along the end of the house, and had several windows facing the old Priory. A glass door opened on a terraced walk beneath the windows, and a path just below led across the turf to the ruined archway.

“This was the late Miss Marchmont’s morning room,” said the housekeeper, in a low voice, to Mrs. Rivers.

Agatha did not make any remark, and there was nothing to call for explanation; the furniture was simple, and, with the exception of a large organ, only such as appears in an ordinary sitting-room.

The minor articles which had formerly given it the appearance of feminine occupation, had been removed by Agatha when she left Greymore; they were *personal* not *family* treasures, and not carefully kept in their accustomed places like those in the study.

“The Maynards do not occupy either this apartment or the one we have just left,” said the housekeeper; “and it is a point of duty with me to see that they are kept in proper order against the time when Miss Marchmont takes possession of her house, if I am permitted to live to that day. It was a condition with Mr. Maynard, when he took the house, that nothing should be changed in these rooms.”

“We will not stay long here,” said Mrs. Rivers, to the girls; “there is not much for us to see, and Agatha may like to be alone a little in her aunt’s room.”

“Miss Agatha, Miss Marchmont I should say, learnt her lessons here when she was a little child, ma’am,” said Mrs. Burnthwaite, “and here she used to read to her aunt when she was ill, and had to lie all day on that couch. And she used to walk by her out there, on the terrace, where her chair was wheeled up and down, for a few minutes every day, almost to the last.”

“Poor Agatha!” said Mrs. Rivers, her eyes filling with tears. “It must be very sad for her to see these places again, but she will not like us to notice her; let us go away and leave her to herself.”

At this moment Agatha, who had been standing by one of the windows, quite at the other end of the room, suddenly came forward, and, as if by an irresistible impulse, seated herself at the organ and commenced playing.

Those who were just walking away paused instinctively; such music as now met their ears must not be missed.

The instrument was of magnificent tone, and had been kept, by express injunctions, in perfect order. Agatha's playing was masterly, though greatly injured by want of practice.

But whatever failures and shortcomings there might be in execution, were atoned for, by her exquisite feeling for music, and the utter absorption of her faculties in the harmony she was creating. The astonishment of her listeners was great; they had never heard Agatha play the piano, and they had no idea that she could play the organ. She had never spoken rapturously of music, and though they had believed her gifted with taste, they had never suspected that she was capable of sending forth the very soul of music as she was now doing.

Even Caroline, whose musical appreciation did not rise above the region of polkas and galops, or a brilliant fantasia with a strongly-marked air, was impressed with the grandeur and perfect abandonment of Agatha's performance.

What she played, none of them knew; it was a wild and wailing melody, with strange transitions to minor keys, and concluding with majestic, full-sounding chords. It was probably the music of some old master, with whose name they were scarcely acquainted, and none of them but Katharine could trace

the intricate harmonies of the composition, but they all felt that it spoke to them with a voice of power, if not of beauty.

Agatha ceased playing, and seemed only then to become aware that the others were listening. She left the organ, and appeared to think her playing required some apology.

“I could not resist trying the organ again,” she said, “and finding out if I could remember any of my old favourites; but we may as well go into the other rooms now. I thought you would not have waited for me.”

“We waited to hear the music,” said Mrs. Rivers. “How is it, Agatha, that you have always concealed this accomplishment from us?”

“I did not know you would consider it one,” said Agatha. “The piano furnishes you with plenty of music at Hazel Bank, and there was no organ to play upon.”

“But we would have managed it in some way,” said Mrs. Rivers; “and you must have missed it so very much.”

“I don’t see why you should not have taken the organ to Hazel Bank,” said Caroline; “it is your own, I suppose, to do what you like with.”

“I should not dream of removing it, Caroline,” said Agatha, with a little severity in her tone; “it shall never, by my will, be moved from the spot where it stands; it and the old house belong to each

other, and some day I hope to play upon it as much as I like."

"It is a beautiful instrument," said Katharine; "and I dare say a piano sounds poor and tame to you, Agatha; but still, I wonder you did not sometimes try it. Playing as well as you do, it must have been a very great deprivation never to hear your own music."

"You think I play well," said Agatha: "I have heard one play on this very organ, before whose skill and feeling mine sank to nothingness. The loss of my own music was nothing to the loss of hers, and I have learnt to do without either. Besides, though my organ playing never satisfied me, my piano playing did still less. I have no lightness of touch, and no brilliancy, which the piano requires to make up for its deficiency in the power and depth which the organ possesses."

She moved towards the door as she spoke, and the others followed, recognizing her as their leader, in this house at any rate.

"Where is Philip?" inquired Mrs. Rivers, missing him.

Philip came from an arm-chair at one extremity of the room, in which he had been sitting since Agatha commenced playing. He was not, as we know, generally believed to be fond of music; nevertheless, on some occasions, he felt its power in a wonderful degree: Mr. Wentworth's singing at



Brakely had been one of them, this was another. What there was in common between Mr. Wentworth's singing, and Agatha's playing, it is not easy to say: the effects of music upon different persons are too subtle to analyse, and Philip himself could not have explained his own sensations. The other parts of the house were less interesting than those which had just been visited. Though none of the furniture had been removed, a few modern luxuries of the Maynards' had been introduced; couches and arm-chairs of easier construction than those in which our forefathers indulged; trifles for ornament or fancied use, new chandeliers and lamps, now covered up by holland bags, time-pieces muffled up in the same way, and various other articles, evidently not belonging to the real, original Greymore, entirely altered the character of the rooms, and they were passed through almost without remark.

"Where would you please to have luncheon, ladies?" inquired Mrs. Burnthwaite. "I will order one of the maids to lay the cloth wherever you choose."

"There is no need for so much ceremony," said Mrs. Rivers. "We had intended to have our luncheon out of doors, and our own servant can do all that is necessary."

The housekeeper looked at Agatha rather doubtfully.

"I had taken the liberty, Miss Marchmont," she

began, "to kill one of my fowls, of my own private stock, hoping that you and your friends would partake of it and one or two other trifles I had prepared; but if you lunch outside, I am afraid anything hot will not be agreeable."

"You were always famed for fattening fowls, I know," said Agatha, kindly. "Perhaps, if Mrs. Rivers has no objection, we may as well remain indoors; we can sit on the terrace afterwards."

Mrs. Rivers was the last person in the world to hurt the old housekeeper's feelings, by rejecting the hospitality which had doubtless been occupying her thoughts for days before, and she agreed at once.

"And in which room?" asked Mrs. Burnthwaite.

"Oh, your own will be the best," said Agatha; "these are full of Maynard associations."

Mrs. Burnthwaite withdrew, and the visitors lounged about at their own pleasure, until they were told that luncheon was ready.

The snowiest of table-cloths was spread on the round table in the housekeeper's room, and the little store of plate, which she had amassed during her many years of industry and economy, was added to the knives and forks which the visitors had brought with them. A delicious salmon-trout, fresh from the stream, commenced the little banquet; and the fowl, of a famous breed, and almost as large as a

turkey, next steamed on the board, flanked by a piece of delicate striped bacon, and such accessories in the way of potatoes and other vegetables, as put those of Brackencliff to shame. One of Mrs. Burnthwaite's most exquisite puddings, and some fruit tarts with cream, followed.

Notwithstanding the good cheer, however, most of the party would have preferred sitting on the grass outside, and eating their cold luncheon unembarrassed by attendance.

Mrs. Burnthwaite insisted upon waiting on them herself, a piece of ceremony which distressed Mrs. Rivers, from so imposing a personage. But Agatha seemed to find nothing unusual in it; and though her tone to the housekeeper was marked by affectionate regard, it was always that of a superior, and she received her services as unhesitatingly as she would have done those of a common parlour-maid. And there was nothing really strange in this. Mrs. Burnthwaite, though a highly respectable person, and to strangers appearing more like a decayed gentlewoman than anything else, had been to Agatha, from childhood, simply a valued and cherished servant.

There was not much conversation during the repast. When it was over, all, by common consent, repaired to the terrace, to sit under the trees and eat strawberries, which, in this northern country, were only now in their full perfection.

Mrs. Burnthwaite had withdrawn to the house, and plans were discussed as to how the remaining portion of the day was to be spent.

One thing, it should be mentioned, had struck Agatha as remarkable, during the time the housekeeper had been with them,—the respect which had marked her manner towards Philip Thorpe. She knew that, though always civil and attentive, the worthy woman was not apt to think very highly of those who had no claim to rank or high family, and her demeanour towards Mrs. Rivers and the girls, though far from wanting in deference, had appeared in some measure to proceed from her consciousness of the relation between them and her beloved young mistress; but towards Philip it was different. She treated him as a superior, and evidently looked up to him in a way greatly perplexing to one who, like Agatha, knew all the old housekeeper's peculiarities, and who was certain, also, that Philip's position with reference to the iron-mines would rather prejudice her against him than otherwise. In some way or other, however, it was apparent that he had made himself respected, and this conviction was not weakened when, later in the day, she witnessed the meeting between him, and some of those whom she recognized as former dependants of her grandfather.

Something there must be in marked individuality, and a powerful mind, even if not of the highest

order, which will tell, in the course of time, against traditional greatness.

Philip now proposed to Agatha a walk to the iron-mines, that she might see what was the actual state of her property. She agreed immediately; but no one else was inclined to venture along what Philip assured them was a very bad road. Katharine had made up her mind to take a sketch of the house, and she went in search of a favourable spot. Mrs. Rivers declared herself contented to remain where she was, enjoying the cool shade and the extensive view, and the younger girls and Willie wanted to explore the ruins, and then to follow the course of the stream, to the torrent which Agatha had described to them.

Agatha and Philip therefore started alone on their expedition. Their way led through the Priory archway, past the ruins, and beyond the farther wall which partly enclosed them: here a narrow, raised causeway skirted the side of the wood, and emerged in a clear space between it and the hills.

As they walked along, Philip explained several things connected with the mines, the nature of the iron-stone first discovered, the course of the beds, and the directions in which the ore was found in greatest purity.

“There is little doubt,” he said, “that the whole chain of hills is impregnated with it, and I wonder the owners of the different estates do not attempt to

work mines, after seeing our success. If they do not seem disposed to commence operations, I think I shall try some time to get more land into my hands and undertake the concern myself. Large capital will be required, of course, but still I might manage to procure that; and after a time, when everything is in train, there will not be enough to occupy me just here."

"And you do not repent of your choice?" said Agatha. "You have no wish to return to your former life at the Grange?"

"I could not do it," said Philip, "unless there was a strong necessity for it; and it is not expected of me now. My father is quite contented with my promise, that the Grange shall never go out of my hands, when, unfortunately, it shall come into my possession; he knows that, whatever other occupations I may have, the farm shall always be attended to, and both he and my mother are satisfied that I have found a course of life more suitable for me, at present, than any other."

"I am still puzzled to know exactly what makes it attractive to you," said Agatha.

"And I cannot explain it," said Philip. "I believe it is because I am interested in the progress of all great works, and because I feel that I am of some use here. I think I can do what I am about better than many people could, whereas, in farming, I only did badly what hundreds could have done better.

People talk of the right man in the right place," he added, laughing, "and perhaps I am in the place for me; but I am not clever at understanding myself. And you know I was not brought up to any profession, so I had not much choice left to me. If I had had my will, I would have been a civil engineer, but it was too late to begin, and I am now about what satisfies me better, I think, than anything I could try. If you lived here, I believe you would become as interested in the mines as I am."

And Philip proceeded to lay before her the visions he had formed of what might be the aspect of the country within a certain term of years, if his plans were carried out, and if others would support him in them, as regarded the working of the ore, wherever practicable; the improvements that would result; how the towns of the district would change their character; how railroads would branch off to this or that seaport; nay, how, perhaps, in the distant future, Brackencliff itself would be a famous place; how all its natural advantages would be employed, and it would become one of the most convenient of northern harbours.

The enthusiasm of a person who is not habitually enthusiastic, has a peculiar charm, and Agatha experienced this, in listening to Philip. She was irresistibly carried away by it, though his aims were what she would once have considered low and unworthy. They were low and unworthy no longer, when ex-

pounded by him, and illuminated by the fire of something that might almost be called genius. She felt, in spite of herself, that Philip's grand desire was the improvement of his race, and that an extended love and hope for mankind formed the basis of his views; that, slight as his respect might appear for those whose tastes led them to wish for another sphere of action than the one he preferred, yet, if the ultimate end of their toil and thought was the same, he had for them, in reality, a wide toleration and a deeply founded sympathy.

After seeing the works, and hearing Philip's explanations, Agatha's attention was attracted to the old farmhouse which he had made his residence. She had known it in former days, when it had been occupied by a hind in charge of the home farm. At present it was no longer required for this purpose, no farm being attached to the Priory. Before Philip had arrived in the neighbourhood, it had been suffered to get out of repair, and even now it had a somewhat forlorn, decayed appearance.

"No one can accuse you of a taste for luxury," said Agatha to Philip, as she looked up at the windows, beneath which they were standing. "If you mean to spend the rest of your days here, shall you choose always to live in such an uncomfortable way?"

"No," returned Philip. "I am not very particular about where I live, but still I think it would be



scarcely a proper dwelling for the director of the extensive works I hope to set on foot. No ; if you will let me have a piece of ground, I will build a house. I can show you an excellent site ; will you come and look at it ?”

Agatha made no objection, and Philip led the way to an elevated piece of land, at no great distance from the works. It did not belong to the regular chain of hills, but rose a little apart from them, having, in the intervening hollow, the farmhouse just mentioned, and the sheds of the labourers. On the open side, this spot commanded an extensive prospect, similar in character to that seen from the front of the Priory, and gaining at the left a glimpse through the trees of the old mansion and of the ruin, the archway, especially, standing out clear against the wood of the park.

“ I remember this hill perfectly,” said Agatha, looking round her. “ I have spent many an afternoon, reading under this tree.”

“ It is a good situation for a house, is it not ? ” said Philip ; “ and there would be no occasion to cut down the trees, and a beautiful lawn might be made, down the slope, with a garden below. Not,” he added, with a peculiar smile, “ that I am likely to want anything very ornamental, but will you let me have the ground if I wish to build ? ”

“ Yes,” said Agatha ; “ I could not refuse it to you. After all your exertions, you certainly deserve a

house. Don't stop me; I may as well say it now, otherwise I may perhaps never say it at all, for thanking people is not in my line; but I really wish you to believe that I am grateful for all the kindness and energy you have shown about my affairs."

"I have only followed my own pleasure and interest," said Philip.

"Yes, I know; but what I have seen to-day has shown me that you have acted with more consideration than many would have done; you have been both careful of my interests and careful of my people,—of those, at least, who *were* our people. The manner of these labourers, some of them old retainers of our family, has shown me that I have much to thank you for; and as it is an effort to make speeches of this kind, I trust you will believe me, once for all, when I say I thank you from my heart."

A gleam of pure pleasure flitted across Philip's face, as he said,—

"I do believe you; I believe every word you speak, for you are truth itself, and hate smooth-sounding falsities as much as I do."

A cold shadow stole over Agatha, as he spoke; the glow of excitement which had prompted her words ceased; she was reminded once more of what she had almost forgotten—her past falsehood. How could she endure to hear herself praised for truth? It was the second time she had heard such praise

from Philip, and she thought she would rather have heard it from any other person.

The higher his opinion was of her in this respect, the lower it would become were her conduct ever revealed to him ; and to think that it never would be revealed to him, and that he would go on esteeming her for imaginary virtues, was almost worse.

She proposed returning home, and began to descend the hill. For some time they walked on in silence, but at last Philip recommenced speaking on his favourite theme, and again Agatha listened with attention.

As they were passing through the ruins, and she was stopping to examine some of the well-remembered carvings, she was struck with a strange sense of incongruity between the present and the past ; she remembered her own meditations in this very place, and was angry with herself for suffering her interest to be now so greatly captivated by totally different subjects. Formerly, the mention of trade, and shipping, and railways in connection with these scenes would have shocked her ; but now her blind, unquestioning reverence for the past, seemed gone beyond recall. She felt half resentful towards Philip for having succeeded in altering the course of her thoughts, and she tried once more to concentrate her enthusiasm on the relics of olden times, and her admiration on the deeds of departed heroes. But all the time there was a growing conviction within

her, that heroism was of no age and no class ; that it existed now as truly as it had ever done ; that there was as much glory to be gained in conquering ignorance and prejudice, and vanquishing natural obstacles, as in fighting against enemies for king and country and opinions ; as much devotion and self-denial to be exercised in the throng of markets, as in the gloom and seclusion of the cloister.

But habit and early education were strong ; she still clung to antiquity and family greatness with love and pride ; and, angry with herself for withdrawing her fealty from old impressions, she scarcely answered Philip's words.

He soon ceased speaking ; he also had subjects for private meditation. He was asking himself what conclusion he should draw from Agatha's demeanour towards him.

Not certainly that she loved him, but still that he possessed a certain power over her ; he had made her eye kindle and her cheek glow in spite of her efforts. He had changed the sentiments and convictions of years. He had seen all this ; and he had also seen her confusion under his praises.

Not grounds, perhaps, to warrant him in asking for her love with confidence, but sufficient to encourage him in continuing to love her.

And Philip did love Agatha with a strong and tender devotion, such as he had never felt even for Katharine, however much his happiness had at one

time seemed bound up in her. He did not worship Agatha as a superior being; he loved her as a woman, faulty and imperfect, but with noble impulses corresponding in some mysterious way with his own; he looked upon her as no divinity, but as a help *meet* for him.

When he had been in love with Katharine, he had admired her, and had considered her everything that was pretty and graceful; but now, about Agatha's face or figure he could form no opinion, only he felt that they had a powerful charm for him. The gravity and decision of countenance which spoiled her attractiveness in the eyes of many, were to him only symbols of depth and unflinching sincerity, and when her pale, cold features were lighted up by an expression of joy and tenderness, an expression which he had seen there more frequently than most people, he knew that she was beautiful.

And in this he was not deceived by a lover's blindness; Agatha had the chief elements of beauty, but only under favouring circumstances did they come into full play.

He had learned to know her face well, and its variations on this afternoon were not lost upon him. It had now settled down into a quiet sadness: the sight of the mouldering Priory had awakened mournful thoughts, and she was dwelling in imagination amongst the friends she had lost.

Manly natures like Philip's long instinctively to

protect and to soothe. The sight of Agatha in a mood when she might welcome soothing and protection, stirred this feeling into full life; all the more because she was usually so self-reliant and self-sufficing. To comfort one accustomed to look for love and sympathy, would have been a tame and unworthy task compared with this, and Philip, as he saw Agatha's eyes fill with rare and unbidden tears, could scarcely restrain the impulse to take her to his heart, and let her know how strongly it was beating with devotion for her alone. Yet he did not speak, but silently followed her into the house. They entered through the glass-door, which opened from the former Miss Marchmont's room. No sound met their ears: apparently the rest of the party had not returned to the house, and Philip, at Agatha's request, went to inquire if Mrs. Burnthwaite knew anything of them.

He learnt from her that they had all gone to the torrent, the three younger ones having brought back an account which had induced Mrs. Rivers and Katharine to go and see it; and Mrs. Rivers had left a message that Miss Marchmont and Mr. Thorpe would find them there if they chose to go in search.

Philip received the information in silence, and then returned to the room where he had left Agatha.

## CHAPTER IV.

## PHILIP'S SECOND ATTEMPT AT LOVE-MAKING.

THE full, rich tones of the organ reached Philip before he entered the room; he paused, and stood in the doorway to look and listen unobserved.

The slanting rays of the afternoon sun fell upon the organ, and gleamed across Agatha's hair; she had taken off her bonnet, and the fine contour of her features, with its massive frame of closely braided tresses, was well displayed. Her face received a faint glow from a crimson curtain which hung over the opposite window, and the unwonted colour harmonized with the unusual fervour of her expression. She was playing like a person thoroughly rapt and absorbed; and the music itself, animated and mournful by turns, was of that kind which exercised so remarkable an influence over Philip.

As he looked and listened, a rush of emotion he could scarcely explain to himself overpowered him; his feelings towards Agatha seemed worked up to a crisis, and he felt that he must speak of them: rash and impetuous as the proceeding might be, he

must pour forth the torrent of his fully aroused affections.

There was a short pause in Agatha's playing, and at this moment Philip stepped boldly forward and walked towards the organ. Agatha looked up; he came upon her so suddenly, but she did not start. She was about say, "Where are the others?" but something in his countenance stopped her. Agatha, the proud, unfearing Agatha, grew cowardly before the sight of his true, manly attachment. For she knew now that he loved her. She rose hastily, and turned to leave the room.

"Stay; I have something to say to you," was Philip's almost imperious speech; and Agatha, scarcely knowing what she did, stayed. "I have been listening to you," said Philip; "and it is your own fault that I am led to speak of what may displease you, but I can be silent no longer. I love you, Agatha Marchmont. Nay, you *shall* hear me; people who love as I do are not turned aside by a gesture; you shall know, as well as I can make you know by weak words, the power of the feelings you have roused in me, and if it be in the power of man to gain woman's love, you shall return them."

Agatha turned pale, and almost trembled, yet a slight quiver of pleasure passed over her face. In a moment it was gone, and she was pale and stern again; but Philip had seen it, and he did not forget it.



"You must not speak in this way," she said, with some effort; "I cannot listen to such words from any one, and from you they surprise and pain me. I hoped that you had sufficient regard for me to spare me the recital of fancied feelings, and I certainly never imagined that you could deceive yourself so far as to think of love in connection with me. There is an absurdity in the very idea."

"Fancied feelings!" exclaimed Philip. "Am I a boy, ready to worship an image of my own creation? Do you know me so little as not to be aware that love is no mere matter of *fancy* with me? If it were not real and overwhelming, do you think I would have spoken it to you? But you do know; I can see you do."

"It is not the first time you have thought you loved," said Agatha.

"Taunt me with that as much as you like," said Philip; "it pleases me to hear it; if you were so utterly indifferent as you profess, it would not have occurred to you just now. It is true, I did love Katharine, but it was not as I love you, and the love I can now offer, as a man matured by thought and action, does not deserve to be classed with the senseless adoration I then felt. You may reject it, but you *cannot* despise it."

"I cannot understand the same person loving both of us," said Agatha.

"Do you wish for the whole history?" said Philip,

almost angrily, "that you may triumph at having changed the vision I had formed of woman's perfections into something so completely different. But I could not tell you if I tried. It must be enough for you to know that my feelings towards you do not at all resemble those I had for Katharine. I loved her like a boy, like a fool I might say; but I will not attempt to sneer at my affection, for, in its way, it was true. My love grew up in me from childhood, and was encouraged by all except perhaps herself. How I was roused from my delusion you know. I suffered, of course, more than I can describe and more than you can imagine. I will not deceive you by passing lightly over that passage in my life; but the suffering has gone now, and with it many delusions. I have been a different being within the last few years; you know that as well as any one."

Agatha interrupted him.

"And you wake out of one set of delusions to fall into another!"

"No," said Philip; "I am subject to no delusion now. I see you as you are, with many faults, some of which you encourage, but beneath them I see a character which suits mine, and which I must love. Yes, Agatha, under your outward coldness you have a rich warm heart and powerful feelings. Though you profess to scorn my pursuits, there is real union between us, and it would be happier

for us both if you would acknowledge it, instead of raising a barrier of pride and wilful misunderstanding——”

“This is too much for me to hear patiently,” interrupted Agatha, with all the dignity she could command. “You have no right, Mr. Thorpe, to dive into my thoughts, whatever liberty you may take in exposing your own; you are presuming on the intimacy I have allowed between us; and it is time, I see, for me to crush it when you speak as no gentleman would dream——”

“No gentleman!” exclaimed Philip, in a scornful voice. “Good heavens! Agatha Marchmont, are you attempting to stop me with conventionalities of this kind? I, a man, with a strong will and a loving heart, am telling you in honest words truths which concern both you and me, and you pretend to misunderstand me and say how a gentleman would or would not act. I thought you understood plain speaking and did not require sugar-plums. But perhaps I am mistaken; perhaps you do not *really* misunderstand me.”

Philip looked steadily into Agatha's face, and her eye fell before his.

“This is rudeness,” she said. “Let me leave the room.”

There was scarcely room to pass between the organ and the wall as Philip was standing, and he did not move as she spoke, but placed his hand upon

her arm very gently, but still firmly enough to detain her unless she used an effort. She sat down again as the more dignified way of proceeding.

Her quietness recalled Philip to himself: he was conscious that he had been speaking in a way not quite justifiable; he had been stung by her apparent coldness and scornfulness into adopting a defiant, fierce sort of manner; altogether, from the very first words, his love-making had been singularly harsh and abrupt.

He now spoke in a gentler tone.

“I have been irritated, and I do not weigh my words; but listen to me a few moments longer. You say, or imply, that you do not return my love; if it is out of your power to do so, there is nothing for me but acquiescence; but consider well, Agatha, before you say it is impossible. All I want is that you should strictly examine your heart towards me before you give a decided answer. I see you think me impertinent for daring to imagine that you can love me. Heaven knows it is no vanity which leads me to suppose such a thing; but something tells me that you do not require perfections to which I cannot pretend, but that a sincere heart, which I can offer, and a resolute mind something like your own, would make you happy. Do not answer me now, but consider. My happiness, at any rate, depends upon your decision; take care that you regard your own also.”

“You are right in preparing yourself to be considered impertinent,” said Agatha, and then she stopped; the whirl of her mind was too great to allow her to proceed. All her haughtiness was kindled at the tone which Philip had assumed: that he should profess to know her so well, and to penetrate her secret thoughts; that he should place himself on a level with her intellectually, and hint at a hidden sympathy subsisting between himself and her; that he should utterly ignore all other points of difference,—her ancient descent, his own plebeian name. Mingled with pride were other less familiar sensations,—strangest of all was one of pleasure: do what she would, she could not refuse to acknowledge that a thrill of delight had shot through her being, when Philip said he loved her; strive as she might, she could not resist a secret approval and admiration of the rough genuine words with which he had answered her ungracious, scornful speeches; she could not help owning that he *did* understand her so far—she preferred them to sugared ones. Even when blaming him and opposing him she had a strange gladness in watching his behaviour; a conviction that he had a decided, powerful character which she *must* respect.

But there was another thought shaking the depths of Agatha's soul,—the consciousness of how unworthy she really was to receive the homage she professed to despise: it was this thought which

armed her for opposition, and made her cling to her old and in reality half worn away notions of pride and independence. It was this thought which swept away all opening tenderness, and whilst actually humbling her proud spirit, caused her to call it forth to help her in appearance. How could she accept Philip's love, knowing how far short she fell of his imagination of her? how could she return it, and, supposing she tore down all other barriers, acknowledge what she felt, whilst concealing that she had committed a deed for which he would only abhor her if he knew it?

In a shorter time than her complicated feelings can be even faintly described, Agatha had recalled her self-control.

"It is no use taking much time for consideration," she said, in a calm, clear voice; "my mind is quite made up, and nothing can change it. If I did not speak decidedly enough at first, my extreme surprise must have been the reason. I hope you will now fully understand that you are utterly mistaken in all your conjectures about me, and also recall to your mind that I have said I never will change my name of Marchmont. Least of all in this spot, and urged by you, could I dream of such a possibility."

"Is that your only reason?" said Philip, in a tone of suppressed indignation; "would you give that answer to every one?"

"Perhaps I might; but you have no right to

inquire," said Agatha; "though, if you wish it, I will be more explicit, and declare that I have weightier reasons than that for rejecting you. The very idea of submitting my happiness to you, and of disclosing to you my secret thoughts, is insupportable and hateful to me."

The words were strong, but the manner was strange;—why this intense anger, this fierce defiance, if she were merely indifferent? Philip saw the self-control which Agatha compelled herself to exert, and he saw the quivering beneath: well, she might storm as she would, and fancy she hated him; such treatment was far better than courteous refusal and civil regret, and he did not despair.

Any further appearance of confidence would, however, only irritate her, so he must, as he had himself said, acquiesce in her decision, and not express any surprise at an apparent inconsistency in her behaviour. By this time his own agitation had subsided; he was indignant certainly at her haughtiness, but he knew that she was exaggerating her natural tendency towards it, and he cared too little for rank or name, to be angry with her for reminding him of his want of them. He quietly bowed to her therefore, and there was neither anger, nor that indescribable tenderness which had so moved Agatha when he first spoke, upon his face as he said,—

"Your answer is decided, at any rate: I submit, and will never annoy you thus again."

Agatha was not entirely satisfied: the old expression of power which she had traced in his features years ago had returned, and she knew that she could neither defy nor despise him; and she knew that she could never crush his spirit by any pride or contempt of hers. There was a strange weight upon her heart as the conviction pressed upon her that this scene was now closed never to be renewed, and, after all, he appeared so composed and so superior that he could not really love her very much. That dangerous sweetness which she had for one moment experienced would never return again. She was embarrassed, and more at a disadvantage than she had ever been in her life; she wanted to leave Philip, and yet something kept her rooted to the spot. He no longer stood in the way; he had retired to one of the windows, but yet she had a dread of appearing afraid of him by going away. She wanted to show that she took him at his word when he said he would not speak to her of love again, and therefore she would not seem to shun him.

She wondered he did not go away himself, but doubtless Philip had reasons of his own for staying.

Agatha's fingers strayed unwittingly to the organ, but she hastily withdrew them again; in her present mood it would have been almost sacrilege to touch it.

With some curiosity she raised her eyes to Philip,



as she fancied, unobserved. But she caught his gaze fastened upon her, and with that expression on his face which she had never thought to see there again,—that deep, unmistakeable tenderness. She was once more delighted, pained, and confused; the contradiction between that look and his harsh words puzzled her so greatly. The relief to her was great when she heard voices approaching the house. She glanced again timidly at Philip. She was unwilling that any alteration in their manner towards each other should give cause for suspicion, and yet she could not quite depend upon Philip's way of behaving to her. She had mortified him, and he might feel unable to meet her with a show of friendliness. Still she could not resolve to speak to him on the subject; but as if he had read her thoughts, he said, walking hastily towards her, as the voices came nearer,—

“You agree with me, I am sure, in thinking it best that we should continue our usual way of treating each other: let us place my folly as much as possible in oblivion.”

“I am willing that it should be so,” said Agatha.

“We are friends, then, in seeming?” said Philip.

“Yes.”

At this moment Caroline and Willie entered the room by the terrace door, and were shortly followed by the rest.

“What a pity you did not come with us, Agatha,”

began Caroline ; “ we have had such a lovely walk, and the river is so pretty. We came back and took mamma and Katharine with us to see it.”

“ Yes,” said Mrs. Rivers, “ I am sorry you were not with us, Agatha ; but we must have an excursion some day to the torrent, and wander about the woods. Did you find your inspection satisfactory ? ”

“ Oh, yes, very much so,” said Agatha, absently. So many thoughts had come and gone since then, that she had forgotten almost all connected with property and business.

“ It is high time to go home,” pursued Mrs. Rivers. “ There will be no moon, and it will be quite dark before we reach Brackencliff.”

“ Mamma, such a short distance ! ” expostulated Katharine.

“ The days are beginning to shorten perceptibly,” said her mother, “ and I am sure, except in broad daylight, such roads as are about here are most unsafe. Will you see about our conveyances, Philip ? ”

Philip left the room, and Agatha seized the opportunity to say to Caroline,—

“ Would you like to go in the dog-cart for a change, Caroline ? I think I have heard you say you like a dog-cart.”

“ So I do,” said Caroline ; “ but will Philip approve of the alteration ? ”

“It does not much signify,” said Agatha, quietly ; “of course he will be glad to drive any of us.”

Thus the matter was settled, and Philip, when he found that Caroline was to be his companion, did not make any remark. They did not start so soon as Mrs. Rivers wished, for the good old housekeeper insisted on making “a cup of tea” for them before they left. However, at last they got off, and, though it was getting dark as they approached Brackencliff, they reached home without any disasters.

Philip declined entering the house, and as soon as Caroline had alighted, resolutely turned his horse's head homewards.

The temporary domestic, a Brackencliff woman, who assisted Hannah in the household duties, greeted Mrs. Rivers with the tidings that a gentleman had called during the day, and had seemed disappointed to find no one at home. He had to leave Brackencliff before evening, having an engagement with a friend at some distance.

“Who could it be?” asked Mrs. Rivers. “Did he leave a card?”

“Neither a card nor a name,” was the reply. “He said it did not signify ; he was coming again to Brackencliff soon.”

Various conjectures arose from this incident. Jenny could give no precise description of the visitor : he was a stranger there, she said, and talked like a south country person, and he was a good size,

and a likely looking young man ; he might be about as tall, maybe, as Mr. Thorpe, but not so square about the shoulders.

With this information she withdrew to prepare supper, and took occasion to inquire of Hannah, when she repaired to the kitchen, whether any of the young ladies had a lover, for the stranger gentleman had seemed very fidgety, and mighty anxious to see somebody.

Hannah was not able to state positively that any of her young ladies had a declared lover. Miss Katharine, she believed, might have had lovers if she had liked, but she did not know of any one who was after her just now, unless it was the cousin of the gentleman who had married Miss Hester. As for Miss Caroline, she had not left school very long, and she could not say whether any one had thought of her seriously as yet ; and Miss Marchmont, though she was as good a creature as ever lived if you were sick or in trouble, never had had a lover, she firmly believed.

“ Now, how’s that ? ” said Jenny. “ She’s a fine young woman as I ever see, with eyes as big and black as—— ”

“ Oh, you should have seen her when she first came to us,” said Hannah ; “ she was as thin as a lath, and such a miserable long face she had. She’s better now, and wears her things more fashionable, but the gentlemen don’t take to her that come to our house.”

“That’s because she’s above them so far,” said Jenny, who, as a Brackencliff woman, had an indirect interest in Agatha, though, having spent great part of her life in service at a distance, she had never seen her during the time of her residence at Greymore.

“I don’t know about that,” said Hannah, divided between her newly awakened appreciation of Agatha and her old allegiance to Katharine and Hester; “I’m sure nobody could be more ladylike and *genteel* in their manners than Miss Rivers and Miss Hester, yet I never saw that the gentlemen were afraid of them. To be sure Miss Marchmont is above them in some things, and has a property of her own, but I can’t say that I see much to admire myself in such a queer, rambling, dismal old house. I’d rather live in our house at Hazel Bank any day.”

“Well, I can’t argufy with you,” said Jenny. “Just look after them eggs for me; I am sure the mistress must be wanting her supper.”

## CHAPTER V.

LIFE AT BRACKENCLIFF. — THE DECISION. — AN  
ALARM.

CAROLINE was the only one of the party who, after the first novelty of a residence at Brackencliff was over, experienced any sensation of *ennui*. She had found sufficient amusement at first in the things which constituted the amusement of the others, but gradually she began to picture to herself the delights of Scarcliff, and to long for the large picnics, the evening promenades, the concerts and boating parties, and the various other excitements belonging to a gay watering-place. She wished for some additional society to the usual family group, and looked out with eagerness for new faces on the sands. But the only visitors at present at Brackencliff were two or three old maids or invalid widows, and a few families of innumerable children, with dowdy mammas and uncouth nurses. Not a vestige was to be seen of a human being likely to interest Caroline.

One afternoon, some days after the excursion to

Greymore, she was sitting in a sheltered hollow under the cliffs, deeply absorbed in one of those ancient, thrilling romances, which the tiny circulating library kept by the postmistress afforded, when, happening to look up for a moment, she caught sight of a gentleman just turning the corner of a jutting rock which separated her from the village. Though she only had a transient glimpse, it was sufficient to satisfy her that he was a gentleman and a stranger at Brackencliff, and of course she concluded directly that he was the unknown visitor who had called the day when they were all absent at Greymore.

Caroline's interest in mysterious monks and haunted towers gave way to a far more vivid one about living people, and she racked her brains to determine which of her acquaintances the stranger resembled, but she had seen him too indistinctly to be able to arrive at any certain conclusion.

She now remembered that it was almost tea-time, and rose to go home. An impulse of curiosity induced her, instead of taking the path by the sands which led to the back of the house, to make a considerable circuit for the sake of walking along the street, and passing the door of the hotel where she felt sure of seeing again the object of her conjectures.

She was not disappointed; the stranger was standing at the door looking up and down the street, and as she drew near he advanced to meet her, disclosing to view the features of Mr. Percival.

Caroline was glad to see him, though he was not a special favourite of hers, but at present any new arrival was welcome, and the prospect of having his amusing talk and rather satirical remarks to enliven the ordinary domestic chat, quite counterbalanced any awe of his cleverness, or dread of becoming herself the object of those same satirical observations.

He, on his part, greeted her with much cordiality, inquiring in a breath for all the family, and appearing positively delighted to see her.

“And when did you come?” asked Caroline.

“I have just arrived, and am only waiting to renovate my appearance a little,” said he, glancing at his dusty attire, “before I call upon Mrs. Rivers, that is to say, if I may be admitted at such a time of the day.”

“We are glad enough to admit people at any hour, in this dreary place,” said Caroline. “You had better come home with me to tea; mamma will be glad to see you.”

“No, thank you; I must stay and look after my belongings, which are coming from the C—— station in that peculiar conveyance they consider an omnibus in these parts. I walked round by the sands myself instead of trying it, particularly as it could not leave the C—— station before the arrival of the mail-train from the south.”

“I saw you on the sands,” said Caroline; “and



could not imagine who you were. I suppose you are the person who called the day we were at Greymore, and puzzled us so. What in the world made you come down here?"

There was a little embarrassment visible on Mr. Percival's well-tutored face, but it did not last more than a moment.

"I am giving myself a holiday," he said; "and I have a friend, a clergyman, settled at Kirbydale about twenty miles off, and hearing that you were here, I determined to take this place on my way to stay with him. You were out, however, so I put off my visit till my return."

"And do you mean to stay any time in this dull little place?" said Caroline.

"I scarcely know," returned Mr. Percival. "I should like to see something of the surrounding country, and I shall probably stay a day or two, though you don't give a very flattering account of the place."

"Oh, you must not judge from me; besides, I liked it at first, and the country really is pretty, only one gets tired of seeing the same thing day after day, and not a creature to speak to; at least, I do: the others praise it from morning till night. But I must go home, and there is your omnibus coming in sight. Mind you come this evening," and Caroline walked briskly away. She found the family at the tea-table, and was met by the inquiry,—

“Why, Caroline, where have you been? We have almost finished tea.”

To which she replied by another question,—

“What new visitor do you think I have seen?”

Nobody guessed right, of course, and so Caroline revealed her piece of news. It gave general satisfaction, for they had been long enough away from home, and from all society but their own, to feel pleased at the prospect of a guest.

“So he was the person who called when we were at Greymore, I suppose,” said Mrs. Rivers.

“Yes,” replied Caroline. “How odd it is we never thought of him!”

“One never does think of the right person,” said Katharine.

Poor silly Katharine! When she had heard of a stranger who had not left his card, and who was described as a “likely-looking young man,” her thoughts had flown to the one person in the wide world she strongly wished to see; and though she knew it was a most unlikely thing that he should have found them out at Brackencliff, her unreasoning heart had clung pertinaciously to the improbable fancy. Still she could scarcely be disappointed on hearing that Mr. Percival was here, and she smiled to herself at the wildness of her imagination, and she prepared herself to enjoy Mr. Percival’s society, and to exchange information with him about the wanderings of the distant Leonard and Hester.

It was not long before Mr. Percival made his appearance: he was even more agreeable than usual, and much more eager and friendly in manner than they had ever seen him. After sitting some time, he professed to be shocked at remaining indoors on such a fine evening, and asked the girls if they were not accustomed to walk on the sands.

Mrs. Rivers said they were, and proposed that they should all adjourn there, so after a little delay the whole party set out.

At first they all walked together in an irregular group, but towards the end of the evening it happened in some way that Katharine and Mr. Percival found themselves walking apart from the others; and this was far from being the last walk they had together on the Brackencliff sands.

Katharine did not flirt—she must be freed from that charge—and yet she was perhaps a little careless and unthinking, and Mr. Percival was not guilty of vanity in believing that she took considerable pleasure in his society.

Katharine really did enjoy conversing with him: she looked upon him as a family connection, and his willingness to talk about Hester, to make conjectures about what she and Leonard Merivale were doing, and what they would do when they returned to England, greatly recommended him to her.

Added to this, she liked to be appreciated, and she knew, by a certain inward consciousness, that Mr.

Percival appreciated her, though it did not enter her head to suppose that he was in love with her. She considered him so much older, so much wiser, so much a man of the world, and so unlike having anything to do with love and matrimony, that she received, without suspicion, attentions that from another man would have aroused her surprise and curiosity, and put her upon her guard.

Besides, Mrs. James Thorpe was not at hand to tease her, and none of the present party seemed to find anything remarkable in Mr. Percival's behaviour: the cousinship with Hester's husband accounted for so many things.

Katharine was a good deal left to herself, more so than she had ever been in her life before, and this made it easier for Mr. Percival to constitute himself her companion.

None of her other sisters could at present supply the place of Hester: Agatha, now that Katharine's illness was at an end, had withdrawn, as it appeared, her attention from her. Caroline was not very companionable; though good-natured and agreeable enough in the general circle, she became rather vapid and wearisome in a *tête-à-tête*; and Fanny was too young to share her deeper thoughts and most cherished ideas.

Mrs. Rivers, it was true, was always ready to enter into the joys and sorrows of her children, but she had too many occupations, and too many divided interests,

to make her society a substitute for the constant companionship of a sister.

Thus it was that Katharine, when weary of her own thoughts, found it a relief to impart some of them to Mr. Percival, and to receive in exchange some of his bold, vigorous ones, which appeared to infuse new life into her intellect, and gave her something to think about when he had gone.

His lingering at Brackencliff did not occasion surprise to any one but Caroline; they were all so delighted with the place that they never wondered that he was delighted also; and of course nothing could be more natural than that he should join in all their excursions, walk with them daily on the sands, and have free entrance to the house at all hours.

Mrs. Rivers, if she saw anything to notice in his constant attendance, gave no utterance to her thought, and there was no reason why she should check his advances; he would be a very suitable match for Katharine, and though far from wishing to lose another of her daughters so soon, Mrs. Rivers would not have dreamt of raising obstacles in the way of her happiness; nay, if anything, she would rather have welcomed the notion of Katharine's affections being worthily engaged, for she had never been able to divest herself of the belief that in one instance her feelings had received a severe wound.

One fine evening, after Mr. Percival had been several days at Brackencliff, he and the girls went

out for a long walk towards the mouth of the river, where there were some famous shell-beds. Mrs. Rivers was not with them, being tired with walking during the day, and Willie was nowhere to be found, an occurrence not at all remarkable, as he had made acquaintance with a family lately arrived at Brackencliff, in which were some boys of about his own age.

But the walking party had not made much progress when Willie's voice was heard in the distance, and they waited till he came up.

"The Forrests have got some donkeys to-night," he called out, as he drew near, "and mamma says we may have some too; so come back, Fanny, and have a ride. We mean to have some races, and Minnie Forrest is going to ride: she said I was to ask you to come, Caroline."

"Oh, dear," said Fanny; "I wanted to look for some shells."

"Never mind; you can get shells any day, but we can't always get the best donkeys: come along."

Fanny consented; and then Caroline said she also would go: it was fun to see a donkey-race when there was nothing else to do. Minnie Forrest was older than her brothers, though still in the school-room, and rather a boyish young lady; but Caroline, in despair of meeting a more congenial companion, had lately struck up an intimacy with her.

"Well," said Katharine, "as you are all deserting

us, I suppose we may as well turn round instead of walking to the shell-beds."

"Why so?" said Mr. Percival. "It is just the evening for a long walk, and I presume you do not wish to attend these donkey-races?"

"No, not exactly," said Katharine; "though I have witnessed less amusing spectacles. Agatha, what do you say? Shall we walk on?"

"I am quite willing," answered Agatha; and they pursued their walk. Katharine and Mr. Percival were the chief talkers. Agatha could not exert herself to be agreeable, for she had really for some days been suffering from even more depression than usual. Yet she was not so wrapt up in her own thoughts as not to attend to what the others were saying, and Katharine unconsciously pained her several times.

Mr. Percival had introduced the subject which he knew always interested Katharine,—her darling Hester's perfections, Leonard's good fortune in gaining such a wife, and their prospect of mutual happiness. Katharine, in speaking of Hester and wishing for her return, disclosed so much affection, betrayed so simply the blank she experienced in her present life, confessed so frankly her dulness and discontent, that Agatha became more than ever conscious of the impossibility of herself supplying Hester's place. She was sure that nothing would ever make Katharine speak of her as she was now doing of Hester,

never could she hope to win such love. In the train of this gloomy idea came the bitter, regretful remembrance of the way in which she had cast herself out of the way of exchanging sisterly affection with Katharine ; and the overpowering burden of remorse fell heavily upon her. Other thoughts added to her wretchedness ; the interview with Philip Thorpe at Greymore, which had never been long absent from her mind since it occurred, now, when she was inclined to be miserable, rushed upon her memory with increased intensity. She felt that she must be alone ; she could no longer keep up the semblance of common attention to her companions. She professed fatigue ; in fact, she really felt it, for a weight was upon her mentally which bowed her down, and though violent exertion might have been a relief to her, walking at a quiet pace was almost insupportable : she said she would sit down to rest under the cliffs, and await the return of the other two.

Katharine at first proposed that they should all turn round, but Agatha would not hear of it, and Mr. Percival strongly urged her to proceed, so at length they went on.

Agatha looked after them for some time : she could clearly discern that Mr. Percival's feelings were of a decided nature towards Katharine, but she could not delude herself into thinking that Katharine had forgotten Mr. Wentworth sufficiently to be able to return them. She watched her too



narrowly to be deceived, although she was at times surprised that she should take such evident pleasure in Mr. Percival's society, supposing her heart to be occupied with the memory of another.

As they vanished from her view, Agatha turned her contemplations inward to her own peculiar troubles; to the agonies of self-reproach, and to the remembrance of Philip Thorpe's face, as it had looked when he had surprised her playing the organ.

When Katharine and Mr. Percival were left to themselves the flow of their conversation ceased. Mr. Percival was the one to blame in the first instance, for he became so silent as to rouse some curiosity in Katharine; and when she made one or two remarks, the answers he returned were so vague as to convince her that he was not in the least attending to her. She therefore became as silent as himself, and sank by degrees into a reverie, filled with a tender melancholy, which the dreamy murmur of the calm waves and the soft, declining light of evening helped to foster. Since her illness, she had been more inclined to indulge this kind of mood than formerly; perhaps some slight physical weakness might be the cause that she could not always summon energy enough to abandon a desponding train of thought, and a despairing sense of loneliness, for which Hester's absence alone did not sufficiently account. Her cheerful manner was so

unvaried that few persons could have suspected it to be assumed; partly because habit had become second nature, partly because when in the company of others, her warm sympathies and strong social feelings made her for the time almost as happy and contented as she appeared. But when given up to her own thoughts, there were moments when Katharine felt as if the spring and elasticity of her spirit had fled, and she could not rise with the buoyancy of hope as in former days. Mr. Percival's voice interrupted her cogitations in a somewhat startling manner.

Abruptly, without the slightest preface, he declared his attachment to her, his desire to make her his wife.

His sincerity and visible tenderness made a strong impression upon Katharine. Had any one told her a week ago that she would have received a proposal of marriage with anything but indifference and an instant determination to reject it, she would have been incredulous; and yet, now that the fact had actually taken place, she was pleased—pleased, and doubtful.

A curious bewilderment came over her: she had always liked Mr. Percival; now that she found he loved her—and loved her, too, with unmistakeable seriousness and warmth, he appeared before her in a different and still more favourable light.

The love of such a man was worth much—not

a thing to be hastily flung away. Gratified vanity undoubtedly had some influence over her, but other more laudable emotions mingled with it. She did not, indeed, imagine for a moment that she loved him with the romance of girlhood, but she could not, dared not, utter a decided refusal.

It was much sweeter than she would have imagined possible to hear that she was loved, and she dreaded to throw aside a chance of happiness for herself, as well as to occasion unhappiness to another, which might be avoided.

She feared, too, that her behaviour to Mr. Percival had justified him in some degree in hoping for her love, and she would not disappoint the hope without being quite convinced that she could not grant the love.

These thoughts passed through Katharine's mind with much greater rapidity than they can be described, and she was not long in determining upon the answer she must for the present return. It was carefully worded, for she did not mean to give direct encouragement.

“Will you allow me time to think about it?” said she. “What you say takes me by surprise. I have never thought of loving you, or of wishing you to love me, but I think much too highly of you, and of having gained your good opinion, to be able to decide at once that I cannot accept your affection.”

“I desire nothing better at present than that you

should consider," said Mr. Percival, "though you seem resolved to prevent my hoping too much. But have you been so blind all along as not to see that I loved you? I am not given to dangling after ladies, and I thought you would perceive that I had a serious motive for seeking your society."

"I am sorry if I have led you to think that I perceived your feelings," said Katharine; "and I am willing to acknowledge myself selfish and careless."

"Do not accuse yourself of any such things," said Mr. Percival. "If you will only understand me properly now, and look favourably upon my wishes, your previous misunderstanding will be of no consequence."

"I will consider," said Katharine; "but you must not draw any inferences from my delay. I believe I should have returned the same answer to any one who had taken me so much by surprise as you have done: I should have been afraid to reject rashly."

"You are resolved to crush a hopeful spirit within me," said Mr. Percival, rather bitterly; then he added, "but you are right; you are only acting in conformity with your candid and amiable nature. And pray believe me when I say this: should you decide upon refusing me, however mortified and grieved I may be, I shall not, after the first moment of irritation, accuse you of ever having received my advances in any spirit of coquetry. Nothing, Miss Rivers, will shake my esteem for you; you have

taught me much and awakened within me much that had been choked and deadened by a too early and unchecked acquaintance with the world, with what you would consider the hard, *worldly* world. Besides, I cannot raise my eyes to yours, so pure and clear and faithful, without feeling——”

But Katharine here interrupted his speech; it was becoming too lover-like for her to listen to, whilst matters were in abeyance. Besides she wanted to be alone, so she proposed walking howewards. Mr. Percival agreed instantly; he had no wish for a longer *tête-à-tête* under the circumstances; indeed, he feared that impulse might lead him to say things which, in calmer moments, in his prouder and habitual state of mind, he would wish unsaid, if Katharine were to refuse him.

They turned round, and walked in almost silence to the place where they had left Agatha. She was no longer there, and they imagined she had become tired and gone home without them. As they approached the part of the sands opposite the houses, Katharine asked Mr. Percival to leave her, as she should go home by the back entrance. He made no objection, and parted from her at the path which led up to the street. Katharine pursued her way along the sands till she arrived opposite their own house; then remembering that it was still early, she thought she would not go in at once, but would sit down on a bench placed on the sands, not far from the back gate,

where she could look at the sea, and deliberate upon her answer with less likelihood of interruption than in the house. She did not fear being disturbed by any ramblers, for it was now high water, and at this particular point the sand was too soft to make it a favourite place for walking, except when the tide was low.

The admirers of constancy may perhaps be a little shocked that Katharine should, in any degree, waver from her unspoken and unasked allegiance to Marmaduke Wentworth; but the circumstances in which she found herself, may be considered as affording some excuse for her doubtfulness as to how far her long-cherished love affected her now, and as to how far she was justified in refusing, for the sake of a dream, the manly and really excellent heart that had just been offered her.

Katharine had no petty anxiety to be married; she had never shrunk in terror from that bugbear of girlish imaginations, the prospect of being an old maid; but she had a dread of loneliness, and though as little inclined to be morbid as most people, she had of late been tempted to join the throng of those

“ Who sigh that no fond heart is theirs,  
None loves them best.”

The selfishness of this feeling might have been checked had she been in her usual health and strength; but anxiety, exertion, and illness coming

upon her immediately after her parting with Hester, had shaken her energies and weakened her self-control. She felt at present as if her happy life at home had come to an end : Hester gone, and no one to supply her loss ; Agatha still reserved and unsociable, and Caroline occupied with interests and pleasures of her own. Her duties, too, seemed no longer so defined as formerly. Agatha was willing to take part of them upon herself, and to come forward as eldest daughter of the house, and Caroline was ready and able to undertake all the light labours of entertaining guests and planning amusement, which had previously belonged to her. What in future was to be her place in the household ? Even Fanny was going to school, and would no longer require her ; was she, in fact, really *necessary* to anybody ? Would not all, even her kind sympathising mother, get on very well without her ? Might it not be that a time had arrived for her to enter upon other duties, and to make the happiness of another home ?

It may be thought that Katharine had become very matter-of-fact and unromantic, that she could sit down and thus calmly state to herself the *pros* and *cons* of anything relating to love and marriage : the fact that she did so, may be taken as a proof that so far as Mr. Percival was concerned her heart was unaffected. Of this she was to a great extent aware ; she knew that she felt for him nothing approaching love, as she understood the word : what was waver-

ing within her, was the belief that love gave happiness—that beautiful theory which she had long ago enunciated, and Agatha had disbelieved.

Had she not been mistaken in giving way to feelings which had no foundation but her own imagination? was she not, in fact, forsaken and forgotten? and had not the faith with which she had clung to the conviction of Marmaduke Wentworth's love and truth, been in reality the simple credulity of a foolish girl? Might not those be right who had blamed her, and condemned him?

The warm blood rushed to Katharine's face at this thought; she knew the light in which her intercourse with Mr. Wentworth had been seen by sober, commonplace people: even setting aside Mrs. James Thorpe and her sneers, she knew there were others who believed that she had given her affections without adequate cause, and that she had, in common parlance, experienced a disappointment.

There was now an opportunity of putting a stop to all such imaginings; to prove that the way of happiness was still open to her; to show herself as an affectionate and cherished wife, instead of a forlorn, love-stricken damsel; to silence at last all doubters and gossipers. Vain hope it was: poor Katharine forgot that they would have been just as ready to say she had married out of pique!

But this was not put to the test; Katharine could not long retain a set of ideas so foreign to her nature;



and a very trifling incident was sufficient to snap the chain of her reasoning, and to release her at once from all her hard, worldly, and certainly *mistaken* views.

A sound reached her from the road, which led up to the street: a young fisherman, sauntering to his home, was whistling a common, simple air, one which Katharine had heard a hundred times without notice. But this time, by some mysterious link of sensation, it reminded her of a day when she had heard Marmaduke Wentworth hum a few bars of it, as they were walking together. Suddenly, as with a lightning's flash, all that day rose before her; every trivial word that had been spoken, every feeling that had struggled in silence; the long-preserved image, which had become faint in her heart, was awakened into vitality, and Katharine knew now what must be her answer to Mr. Percival.

Who can account for such things? By what electric touch could it be that Katharine, who a minute ago had reasoned with calculating coolness, now felt her very soul thrilled through by the memory of a look and a tone?

Most people may have experienced some such sudden change between the tutored outer circle of thought, and that innermost vital one which only keeps the strongest, truest impressions; to explain the connection between them and the change from one to the other is another matter.

Katharine doubted no longer: the love which she had been tempted to consider dead, or at least withered, was a living principle bound up with her being, and her clear judgment told her at once that so long as the memory of one man had power to rouse that wild, tumultuous, nay, in spite of hope deferred, *joyous* rush of feeling, she could never consent to be the wife of another.

With a sense of freedom at being delivered from artificial thoughts, she rose from her seat determined not to lose another moment in consideration, but directly to write a decided refusal to Mr. Percival. She sadly allowed that she had been careless in not discouraging him sooner; but the having committed one fault was not to be atoned for by the commission of a greater.

She hastily entered the house, went up to her own room, and wrote her letter. It was a painful task, but she was very straightforward, and did not pause for words. And yet, honest and devoid of circumlocution as was the answer, there was not a single phrase in it that could wound Mr. Percival's self-love. She blamed herself freely for thoughtlessness, and assured Mr. Percival that she highly valued his regard; but yet declared, with a decision which admitted of no question, that it was an utter impossibility she could ever love him enough to become his wife.

Katharine was not many minutes in writing this

important note ; rapidly she placed it in an envelope, and, having sealed the latter, as the post-office was near, she went out again herself and committed it to the post with her own hands. She was glad to have done with the business, and though sorry at being obliged to cause disappointment to one whom she highly esteemed, she returned home with a degree of buoyancy for which she could scarcely account : it arose, perhaps, from knowing that she was herself again, and that, in spite of sneers and depreciatory remarks, she had been able to keep her faith pure and simple.

What can be more gladdening than to feel that we may preserve our confidence in human nature ? And of human nature Marmaduke Wentworth was to Katharine the type : if he failed, who might stand ?

People of a harder, more prudent stamp than Katharine might have marvelled at the bright, joyful look on her face, as she stood braiding her hair before descending to join the family circle at supper. There seemed so little cause for rejoicing, and yet the brave little heart was beating with free, renewed energy, and a gladness was stirring it in which gratified vanity at Mr. Percival's proposal had no share.

Mere enthusiasm ! might have been the grave, sage comment. And so it was enthusiasm : but what better quality can be brought forward in oppo-

sition to it—to real enthusiasm in its true, uncorrupted signification ?

“ You must have wandered a long way, Katharine,” said Mrs. Rivers, as Katharine entered the room. “ Agatha returned some time ago. I am afraid you will tire yourself with such long walks ; you are not very strong yet, you know.”

“ I have not been walking all the time, mamma,” said Katharine, with a blush. “ I sat some time on the bench outside.”

“ I am sure Katharine is looking better than she has done for long, mamma,” said Caroline ; “ she has got quite a colour.”

Agatha, who had been sitting perfectly silent, looked up as Caroline spoke ; and Katharine blushed yet more deeply as she met her gaze.

Could it be possible, thought Agatha, that she had been mistaken, and that Katharine’s walk with Mr. Percival had been productive of the pleasure which was marked on her face ? She thought too highly of Katharine now to believe, as she would once have done, that the flattering consciousness of being an object of admiration had power to rejoice her so greatly.

But Agatha little guessed that at this moment no thought connected with Mr. Percival rested on her mind. She had almost ungratefully forgotten him, and the gladness which animated her eye and

gave bloom to her cheek had its origin purely and solely in her own imagination.

Such an excited state of feeling could not last long, however, and by the time supper was over Katharine's ordinary appearance had returned, and much of her usual frame of mind. She was inclined to be quiet, and placed herself by the bow-window which faced the sea. Shaded by the curtains from the lights on the table, she looked out at the star-lit sky, and across the pale bar of sand upon the dark sea, which was studded in some parts with little sparkles of light from the herring-boats.

Mrs. Rivers, in an arm-chair at the opposite side of the window to Katharine, seemed either asleep or indulging in quiet musing, and Agatha and Caroline were reading near the table, both apparently absorbed in their books, though probably their studies were of a widely different nature.

Willie and Fanny had retired some minutes previously. The sudden opening of the door roused Mrs. Rivers and Katharine simultaneously from their respective reveries.

As they turned round, Fanny in her night-dress rushing wildly into the room met their view, followed more calmly by Hannah.

"Mamma, mamma! come to the front of the house; there is a fire somewhere; we can see the blaze. Do come and say what you think it is: Hannah says it is stacks."

No one required a second appeal : there is always something exciting in a fire ; and perhaps generally, in spite of awe and danger, and pity for the sufferers, a certain irresistible kind of pleasure in witnessing it, which, though it may be checked as a wrong feeling, will make its way like the occasional nervous inclination to laugh at unsuitable times.

The front bedroom windows commanded a view of the burning object. It was evidently at some distance, but none of the party had sufficient acquaintance with the country to determine the exact locality. Even Agatha found herself at a loss in contemplating familiar scenes from Brackencliff, which was to her comparatively a new point of view.

But no one could think of going to bed or ceasing to look at the strangely fascinating sight without knowing something positive about it ; and they wandered from window to window making various conjectures.

Agatha alone made no remark : an unspoken dread which had not suggested itself to any one else was at her heart.

She sought out Jenny, who, as an inhabitant of Brackencliff, might be able to form a more reasonable idea than the rest as to the actual place of the fire, and Jenny, of course, had a decided theory on the subject.

She was convinced that the fire was in Farmer

Jessop's stack-yard; it was just in the direction for it, and she had been told by some country people that Farmer Jessop might think it a mercy if some of the poor labourers down at Gillbank did not set fire to his stacks, as a judgment upon him for turning them out of employ, and taking wandering Irish as harvesters instead.

"But the Irish have always been employed," said Agatha. "Surely that is no new grievance."

"So they have, Miss Marchmont; but only to help when there was a scarcity of hands in these parts. Would old Squire Marchmont, God bless his memory! have done such a thing? No: but Giles Jessop, he never asks how many folks at Gillbank would be glad of a job, but he goes and hires rascally Irish because he can get them cheap. There was Bill Shipton: you'll remember the Shiptons, ma'am, a decent family in former times. Well, Bill, he was a wildish lad, and he joined the navvies down at Newtown; but when the railway was finished he comes back and wants work, and a right good worker he is, and Farmer Jessop, he calls him a vagabond, and won't give him a day's turn; and Bill, he's got a wife and child now, and they say the old black spirit came over him again, and he swore a great oath that he would have his revenge of Farmer Jessop before the year was out. You mark my words, ma'am, if that fire's not in Jessop's stack-yard, and Bill Shipton at the bottom of it."

“Take care what you say, Jenny, if Bill is a friend of yours,” said Willie, who had just joined Agatha; “for if you are right, you may be called upon to give evidence.”

“Oh, Master William, you need not think to frighten me; I know better than that. Folks don’t go by hearsay evidence.”

Meantime, people were sauntering about in the street, under the windows, and some of their conjectures about the fire were overheard by the watchers inside.

“Oh, mamma,” said Caroline, who was standing at a window with Mrs. Rivers and Fanny, “there is old Ben the boatman: do ask him if he has any idea where the fire is; he must know the country very well.”

Mrs. Rivers complied, and spoke to the old man when he came under the window.

He could not exactly say, he answered, where the fire might be; he had not seen it from a height; but his son, and some others, had gone to the top of the higher cliff, and they would most likely be able to find out. He scouted the idea of Farmer Jessop’s stack-yard; it was too far to the right.

“I don’t think it is like the blaze from stacks,” said Mrs. Rivers to Caroline. “Don’t you remember when some of your uncle’s stacks were burnt three or four years ago? The fire looked very different from this.”



“Oh, see! they are putting it out,” exclaimed Fanny; “how black it looks just now!”

“The flames are bursting out again—look, mamma—higher and higher,” said Caroline. “Is there a fire-engine anywhere near, I wonder. Ben, have you a fire-engine at Brackencliff?”

“No, miss, or we would have had it out afore now; there’s none nigher than Newtown.”

“It is an awful sight,” said Mrs. Rivers. “Surely, surely, it is not a dwelling-house.”

“Barns, perhaps,” said Caroline; “it spreads along such a great extent. See how it mounts up! And the wind is rising too. How will they get it out?”

A number of men came hastily tramping along the street: it was the party from the cliff, the old boatman’s son at their head. The murmur of their voices reached Mrs. Rivers and the girls before they were opposite the house, and the words they gathered out of the confused sounds, made them turn pale and look upon each other in silence.

“The Priory,” “the old house,” “Greymore,” and phrases of the like import, sufficed to set all doubts at rest.

“You are right, father,” said young Ben, as he came up; “the old house at Greymore is on fire.”

“Whisht, Ben! don’t you see where you are? The ladies!”

“Miss Marchmont is not at this window,” said Mrs. Rivers; “and she must know sooner or later, so say all you know. How can you be certain that the fire is at Greymore?”

“I have suspected it all along, ma’am,” said old Ben; and he proceeded to detail his reasons, taken from his knowledge of the localities of the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Rivers listened with a sinking at heart; she knew what a blow this would be to Agatha; and who was to tell her? where was she at the present moment?

“I saw Agatha at the staircase window with Jenny, some time ago,” said Katharine. “She was making inquiries of her. I half think she suspected the truth.”

“At that window she must have heard the men even sooner than we did,” remarked Mrs. Rivers.

“It is no use seeking her,” said Caroline. “I am sure none of us can console her, and she will like best to be alone.”

“Still, it seems unkind to leave her to herself at such a time,” said Katharine. “I will go and look for her.”

And she went. At the staircase window she found Willie, of whom she made inquiry about Agatha.

“She was here when the men said the fire was at Greymore,” answered he; “and when I looked round

a moment after she was gone. I think she went to her own room to cry about it."

"Did she say nothing?"

"Not a word; and that made me look round, she was so quiet. But you know she is not like other girls, and I dare say she would not cry before me."

Katharine darted away to Agatha's room and, contrary to custom, entered without knocking. No one was there; a bonnet and some other articles of walking attire were on the ground, and had evidently been swept off a row of pegs where they usually were hung, and Katharine on looking closer missed a cloak which had been placed amongst them. Agatha had doubtless torn it down in haste, and by so doing scattered the other things, and she had gone to see with her own eyes the destruction of her cherished home. Katharine felt in a moment that it was so, and it seemed to her natural; but when she considered the distance, the lateness of the hour, and the difficulties of the way, she became convinced that Agatha ought not to be left to pursue her walk alone, but that some one should immediately set out, and either bring her back, or protect her if she persisted in her determination of going to Greymore.

She hastened to the room where she had left the others, and declared her conviction as to what had become of Agatha.

Mrs. Rivers was alarmed and puzzled. They

were a household of women, and she did not know whom to send.

Katharine wanted her mother to order the car, the solitary conveyance of the place, and was for starting in it herself, and endeavouring to induce Agatha to return. But Mrs. Rivers objected.

“I should only be anxious about both of you in that case; for you could have no authority over Agatha, and she would insist upon going on, and you would go with her. No; we must send some greater protection.”

“I am sure that is Mr. Percival at the other side of the street,” said Caroline; “see, Katharine, just by Betty Green’s. I am sure he would go in a moment.”

“Will you ask him, mamma?” said Katharine.

“Yes; it is the only thing I can think of. But do you call him; your voice is clearer than mine, and there is such a din in the street!”

Katharine, in her steadiest, loudest tones, called out,—

“Mr. Percival!”

He knew her voice instantly, and hastened forward, only too delighted that she had summoned him. But Katharine withdrew a little as he approached, and left her mother to make the necessary explanations.

His decision settled all difficulties. He sent one of the men near the window to order the car immediately, and said he would start himself in search of Agatha;

but old Ben, who had become aware of the matter under discussion, suggested that it was probable Miss Marchmont had not gone by the road to Grey-moore, but taken a more direct cut across the country, so that it would be as well to send some one over the moors. Young Ben offered to go, saying that he knew the country well, and would be as likely to discover the path she had taken as any one; accordingly he started in one direction, just as Mr. Percival drove off in another.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE FIRE AT GREYMORE.

IN the meantime Agatha was rapidly traversing the wild moorland which lay between Brackencliff and Greymore. A sudden impulse had seized her to start, and witness the destruction of the beloved mansion, if destroyed it must be. But that, she could scarcely think possible; it could not surely perish; if she were herself there, something might be done to stay the flames; energy and desperation would have some magic, mighty power; and there would surely be more virtue in her intense, concentrated desire alone, than in any efforts that could be made by others. It seemed to her wild heated fancy that it would be impossible for Greymore Priory to be actually burnt to the ground, if she were there looking on.

But if it were not so, if inevitable ruin awaited the venerable pile, it would be better, a thousand times better, to see it advancing inch by inch, than to remain at a distance, a prey to suspense, and to the irritating conjectures of those around her.

She tore down her cloak by instinct rather than from any thought of needing its protection, and the same blind impulse, rather than the dread of being discovered and detained, caused her to leave the house by the most unnoticed way, and, stealing along at the back of the street, cross it at the end, and gain the path which led across the moors.

It was a dangerous route, for there were bogs and pits in many places, but she appeared to escape them miraculously.

Though it was nearly dark, and her attention was turned inward, her senses were preternaturally sharpened, and a sort of animal sagacity guided her steps. Excitement did not make her tremble and waver, but increased her strength, and she proceeded at a speed which in a calmer mood she would have thought impossible. Her knowledge of the country was not called upon to assist her; straight as the crow flies, she aimed at the burning object before her.

Obstacles were unheeded, and readily surmounted; she crossed stone walls, the favourite boundaries in a mountainous district, and walked through streams, hardly conscious of the touch of cold water on her feet; and in an incredibly short space of time, she had reached the park of her ancestral home. She felt no injury, though her hands and feet were bleeding from contact with the rough stones, and her garments were drenched and torn. The cloak which

she still clasped round her, had fallen back from her head, and her hair, unloosed by her vehement movements, was floating over her shoulders.

Thus, standing for a moment breathless before the scene of destruction, her face of a ghastly whiteness, and her eyes glaring with a fearful brilliancy, the heiress and the last of the Marchmont race, gazed upon the rapidly hastening ruin of her fondly loved abode.

Her inaction did not last long, but she rushed across the lawn to ascertain the extent of the injury that had taken place, and what measures had been employed to avert it.

The first person she met was Mrs. Burnthwaite, the housekeeper, who was sitting upon a pile of furniture which had been brought from the house. She stared at Agatha in astonishment, at first scarcely recognizing her, but Agatha's voice, hollow and unnatural as it sounded, soon assured her that her dear young mistress was before her.

"What have they done?—who are here?—can it be saved?" were some of the inquiries which assailed the bewildered housekeeper.

"Oh, Miss Marchmont! who would have imagined such a thing?—so careful as I have always been in looking after every spark of light. To think of its happening in my time, and Peggy that I had trusted——"

"Never mind that," interrupted Agatha, passion-



ately ; “ tell me what they are doing now. Is a fire-engine here ? ”

“ Mr. Thorpe has sent for one, and it may be here any time now ; but, oh ! Miss Agatha, don’t go nearer ; you cannot do any good. My dear, you are tired, and cold, and bleeding, I declare. Let me wrap something round your poor hands.”

Agatha stamped the ground impatiently ; she could have flung the poor old housekeeper from her in fury. A savage nature seemed to rise within her. But in an instant it changed, and a despairing cry burst from her, as a tongue of flame shot forth from the window of the very room which had been her own, and a crashing of beams and timbers, and a crackling and spluttering, told that the wainscot was burning like tinder ; that human aid would scarcely avail against the fearful speed of the devastating element.

“ My God, what have I done ? Oh, why should this deep curse fall upon me ? My own home, my grandfather’s home, to perish in my sight ! ”

A dark figure appeared on the terrace steps, and Mrs. Burnthwaite uttered a hasty exclamation.

Philip Thorpe ran down the flight, and reached the spot where Agatha had thrown herself upon the ground in her agony.

It did not require the housekeeper’s explanations to make him recognize her. He gently took her

hand and raised her, heaping up some cushions to form a seat for her.

“Agatha, Agatha,” he cried, regardless of the fact that they were not alone, “where is your courage? Be brave. All that *can* be done, *shall* be done, and if we are not strong enough to save it, you are strong enough to bear the loss.”

“You do not know,” said Agatha, “oh! how I have loved it; every room, every nook!” She stood up suddenly and shook off his hand.

“Why do you stay here with me? Go and work: you are a man, and can do much. Why are you all so inactive, letting it burn before your eyes?”

And she turned to a group of smoke-begrimed men who had collected on the terrace.

“They have worked well so far,” said Philip, quietly; “but we must wait a few moments for the engine: it is now coming up the park.”

“Leave me, then,” said Agatha; “surely you can do something.”

Philip obeyed. She saw him walk towards the burning mass, and she closed her eyes, dreading what might next meet them; even in her great misery to encounter fresh misery.

The fire-engine drew near; the ominous tramp, tramp, of the firemen sounding through the park.

Though everything looked confused, an orderly system of work was now pursued, and Agatha, in spite of her desperate longing for activity, felt that

all that was possible was being done, and that she, with all her ardent will, could not do anything to help; that she could not even infuse greater energy into the contest with the terrible enemy. All worked as in a matter of life and death. During the short interval that she had kept her eyes closed, she had succeeded in some measure in regaining her self-command.

Philip had said she was strong, and she would prove herself so. She drew up her figure from its crouching attitude; gathered together the scattered masses of her hair, and bound them round her head, and, folding her cloak over her thin muslin dress, she walked with a firm step entirely round the house. She did not gain hope from a closer survey: the fire had spread through the middle of the building, and the wing facing the ruin was also in flames. The least important part of the house, the kitchens and servants' apartments, had escaped. Least important in one sense, yet most important in another, as there would have been the only risk to human life.

Agatha sat down at last on a great stone under the Priory arch and watched. What she saw would require an abler pen than mine to write: the fury and destruction of a great fire has been depicted many times in thrilling language; let such descriptions be recalled now, and let us pass from the contemplation of the actual scene to its effect upon

Agatha's mind. She was now calm, outwardly ; so much so, as to astonish good Mrs. Burnthwaite : she listened in silence to the accounts of the probable origin of the fire, and to the housekeeper's invectives against the careless Peggy, who had gone into the drawing-room to replace some chair-covers which had been washed ; and it was supposed had dropped some sparks from her candle.

She listened, but could not rouse herself to sympathy with Mrs. Burnthwaite's anger. Scolding Peggy, alas ! would have given her small consolation. She exerted herself to make some inquiries about the servants : they were few in number, owing to the absence of the Maynards, and she was relieved to find that all were safe. The fire had been discovered early enough for them to make their escape, even those who were nearest the centre of the house, where the fire had commenced : and a boy had been immediately sent to fetch Philip Thorpe, whom Mrs. Burnthwaite had considered the best person to apply to in her difficulty. Much of the furniture had been saved—nearly all of it which belonged to the Maynards ; the organ too, by great exertions, had been carried out of the house, and many of the pictures had been taken down and brought away by Mr. Thorpe's own hands. But the want of a fire-engine had been the chief obstacle : the men had formed lines, and thrown water from buckets, but the timber was so old and dry, that little good could be done.

Mr. Thorpe throughout had worked as hard as any of the men, and had ceased taking down the pictures, to help them with the buckets.

A sudden thought struck Agatha at the mention of the pictures ; she rose from her seat and ran towards the house, exclaiming—

“The little study ! the portrait there and the sword ; they must be saved : who will go ?”

She looked round amongst a cluster of men who were resting for a few moments from their labours.

“The room is already in flames,” said Philip Thorpe, appearing on the steps. “I would have saved them before if there had been time.”

“Who will go ?” exclaimed Agatha, unheeding his speech. “Not one of you,” she pursued, turning to some whom she recognized as her grandfather’s retainers ; “not one of you, to save his picture and the sword he prized ?”

Something was muttered about wives and families.

“You shall be rewarded, I tell you ; I will give money—yes, what you will—to the man who will fetch me those treasures.”

A woman’s voice rose from the circle of bystanders loud and shrill.

“Your money won’t pay for flesh and blood.”

And a muttering and murmuring was heard amongst the men, but no one stirred.

“It is as much as our lives are worth, Miss Marchmont,” said an elderly grey-headed man, a former ser-

vant of the family, in a respectful tone. "I would go myself to save a life, but for a picture——"

"Must I go myself?" said Agatha, passionately. "Oh, that I were a man, that I need not stay to waste words here."

There was a slight movement near Agatha, and the old grey-headed man called out—

"For the love of God, don't go, sir;" but he might as well have tried to stay the winds; Philip Thorpe was rushing up the steps and along the side of the building. Unheeding all expostulation, he hurried on; hurried on even when a long piercing shriek rent the air, and the word "Philip," in a voice of agony as deep as was ever sent forth from a woman's heart, reached his ears; hurried on, even then, and vaulting through an open window which the flames had not yet reached, disappeared within the house. Agatha sank down on the ground, and covered her face with her hands: those around withdrew, respecting her anguish too much to intrude upon her: an inborn refinement told them that no human eye must seem to take cognisance of the desperate, impassioned feeling which she had vented in that self-betraying cry. But Agatha would not at this moment have heeded the presence of the whole world: there was no room left in her heart for maidenly shame, and, whether Philip lived or died, she recked not now who knew that she loved him.

During one instant the veil had fallen from her

eyes; old feelings, old hopes, old remembrances, had all been crushed out by one overwhelming sensation, one intense reality, dread of danger for Philip Thorpe. Old forms of thought had vanished and old delusions had passed away; one great truth, dimly suspected before, but unacknowledged, burst suddenly upon her.

Oh, human life and human love, precious and sacred beyond all else here in our lower world, what shall contend against their mighty power? Shall relics of bygone deeds, memorials of pride and glory in former days, nay, even shall mementoes of a past affection, weigh one feather in the balance, against the worth of one living, beating, loving heart?

Agatha had heard, as one who hears not, the woman's cry that money could not pay for flesh and blood; selfishly she had driven forward to her purpose; those words thrilled through her now, and seemed prophetic of her wretchedness.

In a state of apparent stupor she remained sitting on the ground, deaf to all that took place near her, but listening with intense acuteness to every sound that came from the house.

She dared not look, but she must hear. How much agony, how much self-reproach, how many mistakes discovered, how many illusions cast away, and how many strong realities seized, were crowded into one brief period, who may say? The rapidity

of thought at such a time defies description, defies even after-realization. That moment was a crisis in Agatha's life and her destiny ; perhaps it is not too much to say that all her character henceforth took a colouring from it.

The only external impressions of which she was conscious, were that a strange voice was addressing her, and that a strong but kindly arm was raising her from the ground.

Mr. Percival had arrived, and was striving to protect her and to soothe her ; but his efforts were fruitless. Agatha shook him off, saying repeatedly, "Leave me, leave me ;" not in the imperious, almost fierce accents which she had used to Philip a short time before, but in a pleading, wearied voice, as if unequal to further exertion.

Mr. Percival saw it was useless to interfere with her at present, and he withdrew to despatch some one in all haste to Brackencliff, with a message to Mrs. Rivers that Miss Marchmont was safe, and that he would not leave her until she consented to return with him.

All that has just been related did not occupy more than two minutes ; at the end of that time a shout was raised.

"Safe, safe !"

"Mind the falling timbers !"

"Here, sir ; throw me the sword."

"There, catch hold of the picture !"



“He’s safe—he’s out alive.”

Agatha listened to these various speeches, one breathless instant. Then she opened her eyes; Philip was on the terrace steps, white and ghastly; a strange object to look upon, but *alive* and seemingly unharmed. He still held the sword, and the picture was being carried away to a place of safety, but of them Agatha took no heed.

She rose suddenly, tottered a few paces forward, and fell into Philip’s outstretched arms.

Very closely he held his precious treasure, knowing now, without need of another word, that it was indeed his own.

He was weak and suffering from his contest with the flames, but he did not relax his grasp of Agatha until he had dragged or carried her to the Priory archway; there he laid her gently down upon the cushions and sat down beside her, seeking to restore her consciousness.

But she was not quite unconscious; she had not really fainted, only she was too agitated to speak. She opened her eyes and looked at Philip, but neither of them could ever remember afterwards, how the next few minutes were passed. They knew that they loved each other, that no human power could ever tear away the delicious consciousness, that had been gained in those desperate moments of danger. And no thought of pride clouded Agatha’s soul; nothing but the deepest humiliation, for had she

not exposed Philip's life for what was now a worthless fancy?

It was not that her affection for the beings whom she had formerly loved had sustained any diminution, but her value for mere associations and her glory in the past renown of her race were deadened or quelled. No hero of former romance or history could now displace Philip in her estimation; no loss of cherished property or empty relics, compare with any threatening of harm to him.

When she had ascertained that, though bruised and exhausted, he had not received any serious injury, and that the furious flames had been successfully warded off him, by the precautions he had not forgotten to use—that only the singed appearance of his curly black locks and of one of his eyebrows showed how near he had been to danger—when she could absolutely believe in his safety—then she was able to listen to his words, words so much sweeter and dearer than she had imagined any would ever be to her; and her mood changed and a flood of quiet, abundant, *womanly* tears relieved in some degree her excited, over-wrought feelings.

In spite of everything, she was strangely happy; even the destruction of Greymore, her early home, the imagined scene of her future life, could now be borne. Its walls seemed now mere wood and stone, dead atoms of matter for which she could not grieve. Life and reality were about her and around her, in

Philip's eye, and Philip's voice, and Philip's protecting arm. But even this mood must have an end: Agatha's attention was caught by a group on the lawn; people looking towards her and Philip, but evidently fearing to intrude upon them.

A burning blush, such as Agatha had never felt before, mounted up to the very roots of her hair, and she remembered how she had betrayed herself. She could not exactly feel shame: Philip was now beyond all doubt her affianced husband; but still it was so new for her—the cold, the retiring, the haughty Miss Marchmont—to show herself before public gaze in the light of a weak, loving woman, that she shrank within herself, and longed for nothing so much as to be far away beyond the reach of all observation.

“We must not stay here,” she said at length to Philip; “those people are looking astonished, and they want directions from you, I suppose.”

“True,” said Philip, “I had forgotten; I will go instantly.”

“I did not quite mean that,” said Agatha; “you are not fit for more exertion just now, I am sure; but tell me what the men are to do; I think,” and the colour again flushed Agatha's cheek, “I am sure almost, that I saw Mr. Percival a few minutes ago: I will see if he cannot do something.”

Philip did not consent to this; but he was in reality too much exhausted to resume his labours,

and after walking a few steps forward, he stopped and said—

“You are right: seek Mr. Percival, Agatha, I will stay here.”

Agatha's search was not a long one. Mr. Percival had taken upon himself to direct everything when Philip had retired from the scene of action; but there was not much left to do now, and Agatha met him coming down the steps to look for her.

The fire had been to a great extent put out; instead of raging flames, a dense smoke was now visible, and the building appeared a smouldering mass instead of a fiery volcano. But, alas! the magnitude of the destruction was sufficiently evident, and the just-risen moon gleamed faintly over a scene of ruin.

Mr. Percival met Agatha with a quiet, respectful sadness of manner.

“Everything possible has been done, Miss Marchmont; it is useless for you to stay longer, to harass yourself with this sight. Come home with me now.”

“Tell me the truth, Mr. Percival,” said Agatha, in a firm voice; “I wish to know the exact amount of the mischief.”

“The greater part of the house is a mere shell,” said Mr. Percival, “in the south wing and the centre there was so much wood, and it burnt so rapidly; the servants' rooms in the north wing are

comparatively uninjured, but the house can never be habitable again; it must be almost entirely rebuilt. I am sorry to tell you this, but you wished for the exact truth."

"Thank you," said Agatha; and then there was a pause. Then she said, "I will go to Brackencliff, *home*; I cannot think just now: but these people must be properly rewarded."

"Do not distress yourself; all shall be attended to in time," said Mr. Percival; "only the men have worked hard, and need some present refreshment. Shall I speak to the housekeeper?"

"I am afraid she has not much in her power," said Agatha, with a faint smile; "you know she is not now in my service, and only servants have been in the house."

"Well, I dare say she can give them bread and cheese, supposing the pantry to have escaped, and we can send to Mr. Thorpe's for something. I hope he is not much injured?"

Agatha did not reply; she was walking towards the spot where she had left Philip.

Matters were speedily arranged with Mrs. Burnthwaite: Mr. Percival was not in love—at least, not with any one present—and he thought for both Philip and Agatha.

When he had done all he could, he came up to them, and said the car was ready.

Philip started to his feet.

“How are you going? I shall see Miss Marchmont in safety.”

“Indeed you will not,” said Mr. Percival. “I was sent expressly to seek Miss Marchmont, and I shall carry her off immediately in that precious Brackencliff conveyance. As for you, I have taken the liberty to order your dog-cart, and in that you will instantly proceed to your own house, and get to bed as soon as you can.”

Philip was the last person in the world to make Agatha and himself conspicuous by any excessive show of anxiety about her, so he submitted to Mr. Percival’s arrangements.

He waited, however, till she was seated in the car, and whispering, “I shall come to-morrow,” grasped her hand fervently, and they parted.

Agatha was able to think uninterruptedly during the drive home, for Mr. Percival did not make the least attempt at conversation. She tried to disentangle the confused impressions of her mind; to recall everything that had happened since the first alarm of fire. How long ago it seemed! almost a lifetime since Fanny’s little white figure had appeared in the drawing-room doorway, startling them all from their quiet occupations! How strange it was to remember those moments just before, when she had been calmly reading, with no forebodings, no distant imaginings of the terrible event which was already in progress!

Then came the doubt—the certainty—the wild flight over the moors, like a hideous dream in remembrance: the sight of the fire, the passionate struggling against the inevitable; Philip's desperate attempt—the agony and despair—the crowding of life and sensation into one brief moment, and the inexplicable whirl of bliss which had followed.

But when Agatha had traced the past up to this point, there rushed upon her a bitter, overwhelming thought.

In the rapturous consciousness of loving and of being loved she had forgotten all obstacles to her happiness; her unrevealed fault, her disgraceful falsehood, everything that rendered her unworthy of Philip Thorpe's love.

Her wretchedness when this blessed oblivion was broken, when the sudden change from the certainty of returned affection to the conviction that such affection must soon be turned to contempt, perhaps to loathing, was crushing, and bordered on despair.

Her short dream was gone from her; the newly-tasted joys of mutual love and willing dependence must be cast aside; Philip must know her as she really was, and then despise her.

It was now that Agatha recognized most vividly the actual sinfulness of her conduct: *grief*, and not, as heretofore, *shame*, was the predominating emotion. Her heart was softened, her pride subdued, her whole nature had expanded, under the shock of

extreme joy and extreme sorrow which had that night assailed her, and real humility had at last touched her. She felt that she was weak, and prayed for strength.

There was no struggle in her mind regarding her conduct to Philip: she *must* unveil her real self to him: it would have been agony to receive his love, knowing that he was deceived in her; but then there was that other long-delayed confession to be made, the one to Katharine.

With the new light which had burst upon her, with her now humbled spirit, it was no longer so difficult as formerly.

Compared with the loss of Philip's regard, the loss of Katharine's was of small importance.

With sternest self-condemnation she now reviewed her unsubmissive, self-willed state of mind when misfortune had attacked her, and destruction had threatened the abode about which she had formed such vain and selfish plans; she recalled the stubborn, nay, impious, words which had fallen from her, and she bent her head in utter prostration and penitence. Instead of questioning the justice of the blow which she had received, should she not rather wonder at the momentary glimpse of happiness which had been granted to her? Transient as it had been, it was far beyond her merits: who and what was she that she should claim anything as her due?



The foundation of Agatha's pride was sapped at last: the appointed discipline had done its work. Leave her to her thoughts: into some of the soul's secrets we should not seek to enter.

None of the party at Brackencliff had dreamt of going to bed before Agatha's return; they were all too much excited for any such proceeding, too eager to hear the latest accounts of the fire, and too anxious to learn how Agatha bore her calamity.

When the car drove up to the door, there was a general rush down the stairs and along the passage; the impression of Agatha's reserved character melted away under the consciousness that she was suffering; and, though no one knew exactly what to say, all were desirous of offering some kind of consolation.

Agatha's own behaviour was a great relief to them; her agitation had passed away, or rather she was too much exhausted by the excess of it, to display it now, yet she did not wrap herself up in sternness; her manner was sad and grave, and she received the few affectionate words and really motherly kiss of Mrs. Rivers with a quiet gentleness, which in her was almost touching.

All were kind and eager for her comfort: she was led directly to the fire, which had been kindled on purpose for her; the easiest of arm-chairs was brought for her, and dry shoes and stockings placed in readiness.

The poor wounded feet and hands were tenderly

cared for, and Jenny was busily engaged preparing the refreshment which would, it was thought, prove the most acceptable.

Agatha passively submitted to be waited upon; she was almost too weary to feel her wretchedness, and she experienced a sense of soothing in the attentions lavished on her, which would not have been possible had she been more capable of thought.

She felt that when trouble and weakness came, family ties which had hitherto been uncared for, were truly precious.

Though she could not reason on the subject, she had an instinctive conviction of the value of hearty kindness even from those with whom there could be no mental sympathy, from whom no true appreciation could be expected.

The only thing from which she shrank was Katharine's care for her; when Katharine took off the torn, damp stockings and began to chafe the cold feet, she shuddered, and drew her foot away. Katharine looked surprised, but said nothing, and Fanny now brought the warm stockings, which Agatha suffered her to put on.

"I don't know, after all, why we are dressing you, Agatha," said Katharine, "when you ought properly to go to bed. I really think we are all bewildered."

"You forget," said Caroline, "that she must first have some of the arrowroot, or whatever it is Jenny

is making, and it would not do for her to sit up with bare feet."

"I don't want anything," said Agatha; "I had better go to bed."

"You are quite exhausted," said Katharine; "mamma will insist upon your having something, and if it is ready you may as well have it before you go to bed. I will go down and hasten Jenny."

Meantime Mr. Percival had been giving Mrs. Rivers some details about the fire in another room, and was lingering as long as he could in the hope of again seeing Katharine, and saying "good night" to her.

He had some vague idea that he should learn his fate from her manner, and though he had professed to be satisfied with delay, he was rather inconsistently beginning to think that suspense was a greater evil than disappointment.

Katharine, however, did not appear, and, as he had no excuse for staying longer, he took leave of Mrs. Rivers. In the passage he was fortunate enough to encounter Katharine returning from her visit to Jenny, and he stopped her to inquire about Agatha.

"She seems a good deal tired and worn out," said Katharine; "but I dare say a night's rest will restore her."

"Yes, she has had a great deal to bear," said Mr. Percival, but it was evident from his manner that he was not thinking much of Agatha.

“I am sure we are all grateful to you for the trouble you have taken,” said Katharine, hastily; “good night.”

And she was hurrying away, but Mr. Percival caught her hand.

“One moment, Katharine; have you nothing to say to me?”

“I have written,” said Katharine; “you will see in the morning.”

“But you can tell me now.”

Katharine withdrew her hand; she saw he was expecting a favourable answer.

“Oh, Mr. Percival, I am so sorry. I wish I had spoken at once, but I was afraid of not doing right. I did not mean you to think——”

He saw how it was now.

“You mean that you have rejected me. Only tell me why you cannot——”

“You will get my letter in the morning,” said Katharine; “it will tell you all. I cannot talk now; it is better not. I am sorry, really sorry.”

“Nay, don’t pity me. I cannot bear that.”

“You are angry with me,” said Katharine, “for having led you to expect something different. It is that which grieves me, but you will excuse me some time, I know. Let us part friends.”

“We do part friends, Miss Rivers,” said Mr. Percival; “I do not intend to blame you. Good bye.”

Katharine held out her hand, and he shook it heartily.

He walked away, and opened the street door for himself, but Katharine could see that the hurt, proud look came again over his face as he turned to shut it, and the light of the candle she held fell upon him.

She was sorry, and felt guilty for having so completely forgotten him during her happy dreaming after writing her refusal, and she resolved that if ever—though it was very unlikely—any one else should like her well enough to wish to marry her, she would be careful not to allow matters to proceed so far.

With a sigh of relief as the door closed, she turned round and went upstairs to Agatha and the others.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE DELIVERY OF THE LETTER.

AGATHA had fancied it impossible that she should sleep; yet she had not been many minutes in bed before she fell into a deep, calm slumber. She was too thoroughly tired even to dream, and she awoke strengthened and refreshed.

It is easy to imagine what an awakening hers must have been, after the momentous night in which she had experienced such deep grief, and such strange delight.

It was a work of some time to collect her thoughts; the first thing which made itself clear amidst the confusion, was the necessity of at once performing her long-postponed duty towards Katharine.

The instant that this idea occurred to her, she rose and hastened to look at her watch, but it had stopped. During the agitations of last night, she had naturally forgotten to wind it up. But her room had a sea view, and she readily ascertained from the state of the tide, and various indications

about the boats and boatmen on the sands, that it was still early morning.

No one in the house seemed to be stirring; indeed, it was probable that all would take an extra sleep, after the disturbances of the night. But Agatha felt that she, at any rate, could not rest longer, and she commenced dressing, intending to see Katharine as soon as possible, and make her listen to the history of the letter.

That fatal letter! once more it was taken from its hiding-place; now, for the last time: in another hour or two, it would have passed into Katharine's possession. How many remembrances, how many broken vows and fruitless wishes, were associated with it! How often she had looked at it, formed conjectures about it! Almost it seemed to have acquired a sort of vitality in her eyes; it appeared in some mysterious manner to have become blended with the writer; and she could have fancied that, by a species of magnetic *rapport*, he must be aware of what that dumb paper had witnessed.

Dismissing these superstitious imaginings with something like a smile at her folly, and breathing a prayer for the inward strength of the need of which she was now at last aware, she left the room.

By this time there were sounds in the house; Hannah was dusting the dining-room, and Jenny was carrying on a conversation with the milkman at the door.

Agatha looked into the sitting-rooms, but none of the family had as yet appeared. She then strolled into the so-called garden at the back of the house; a square of coarse grass with a few wallflowers and pinks, and one or two stunted currant bushes; and here she walked up and down the flagged pathway, waiting for some chance of seeing Katharine.

She tried not to think: she knew what she had to do at the present time, and she wished to avoid all consideration of the future, knowing how frequently too much tracing of the consequences of an action right in itself, had weakened her resolution. She counted all the flags of the causeway, and was particular to step upon each of them; then she tried to count the broken bits of glass on the wall, and broke down in the attempt, as wearied as if she had been engaged in some important affair; and all through this mechanical, childish occupation, there was a gnawing consciousness, a burning excitement, at her heart.

She grew impatient at length, and was thinking of going to seek Katharine in the room which she shared with Caroline, and entreating her to hasten her toilette, when Caroline and Fanny appeared at the door in walking costume.

“You up already, Agatha!” exclaimed Caroline. “I don’t think you can have had sleep enough.”

“You were up yourself as late as I was,” said Agatha. “But where are you going?”



“We are going to bathe,” said Caroline; “it is no use waiting till after breakfast, for we shall be late this morning. Fanny says mamma is still asleep.”

“And Katharine?” asked Agatha; “is she up?”

“No; she could not sleep last night for a long time, so I advised her to stay in bed: you know she is not very strong yet. And you, Agatha, don’t look very brilliant this morning; you should have given yourself a little more rest. But come, Fanny, we must not lose our time; the tide is at the best for bathing.”

And the two girls walked off, more eager than usual to get out this morning, that they might hear some of the details about the fire at Greymore; for though one might suppose that the old saying about carrying coals to Newcastle, would have applied to news of that kind addressed to them, it did not really apply. They did not expect Agatha to be very communicative, and there would naturally be some restraint in discussing the subject before her; besides the conjectures about the origin of the fire, and the exaggerations which could not fail to be stirring, would be far more exciting than any recital of the plain facts.

Agatha went into the house. She had not any compunction about disturbing Katharine, for she had an intuitive conviction that the letter which would

at length be delivered to her, would be more beneficial than any additional repose could have been, however painful it might be to her to know the way in which it had been kept from her.

Agatha almost ran up the stairs; it seemed to her as if, unless she made haste, something would draw her back; she half fancied that some evil spirit was visibly present, beckoning her to turn. It was no wonder, after all she had gone through, that her brain was overwrought, and that wild thoughts assailed her.

As she turned the handle of Katharine's door, common sense returned to her; she stopped a moment to compose herself, and ask permission to enter.

A sleepy voice answered, "Come in," and Agatha went into the room.

Katharine half rose up in bed, when she saw her, she was so surprised: she said something about hoping she was not tired, and asked if she wanted anything.

"I do not want anything but to speak to you for a few minutes," said Agatha, carefully closing the door. "Lie down again, Katharine."

Katharine did as she was told, and Agatha sat down by the bedside. But for a moment or two she did not speak, and Katharine began to be afraid that she had some bad news to communicate, and she exclaimed:

“What is the matter, Agatha? Do tell me at once.”

Agatha commenced in a cold, forced voice, which increased in animation as she proceeded :

“What I have to tell you is something that happened long ago ; it was on a Christmas eve, three years and a half ago. It was the year Mr. Wentworth had been staying at Coverdale ; do you remember now ? ”

Katharine’s attention was fully roused.

“I don’t remember anything particular about that day, but I dare say I shall if you go on.”

“That morning I went into Fairfield, and some of you asked me to call at the post-office. Before I started I had overheard a conversation, in which Mrs. James Thorpe took the principal part, but you all joined, and things were said about me which made me angry ; more than angry, ashamed on my own account, and almost fiercely indignant at you, Katharine. Do not start ; I must tell you all. At that time, I fancied I loved Mr. Wentworth ; I was perfectly convinced that he did not care for me, yet I could not bear the idea that he preferred you. Some of your expressions made me think that you knew of his preference and gloried in it, and considered it an impossibility that he should think of me. I cannot describe all my guilty thoughts. I accused you of using arts to attract him ; I even thought it a piece of injustice in him to love you instead of me. I

believed myself superior to you, and that I was more fitted really to make a man like him happy. All the time I was walking to Fairfield, I was giving way to evil passions against both of you."

"You could not have really loved him," said Katharine, almost involuntarily.

"No: I know now that my self-love and pride were wounded, rather than any other affection. Well, I received a letter for you at the post-office. You may imagine what I felt when I saw it was from Mr. Wentworth."

Katharine started up, and fixed a rapt gaze upon Agatha.

"Don't look at me so, or I cannot finish. I had evil thoughts about this letter. I imagined your triumph over me, for, of course, I concluded it contained a declaration of love. I began to think, suppose you never received the letter; if it were to fall into the water? I was standing on the little bridge, when I thought in this way."

"Oh, Agatha, you could not do such a thing," Katharine exclaimed.

"No, I did not; but I gave way to the wicked thought, and accident did it for me. I cannot explain without taking a long time, how it happened, but I must trust that you will believe me. It slipped from my fingers, and the wind bore it away. Oh, Katharine, this part of my conduct at least was undesigned. You will believe me?"

“Most certainly; but why did you not tell me?”

“I was miserable: I would have given worlds to recover the letter, now it was gone; I could have rejoiced to see it in your hands. I searched in all directions, I attempted everything, but I had no success. I could not find the letter, and I gave it up and walked home. Before I reached the house, I began to feel an awkwardness about telling you what had happened; it seemed so odd that I should have lost one letter, and yet kept the others. It had been in my hand, and the rest in my pocket. I thought it would appear a lame story to you; then I imagined you asking me about the handwriting and the appearance of your letter, and I knew that I should answer in a confused manner, feeling guilty on account of my former thoughts about it. If I tried to equivocate, I should do it badly, and you would suspect something; in short, I worked myself up into thinking that you would guess I had lost the letter on purpose.”

“How could you think so?” interrupted Katharine; “it seems such a far-fetched idea.”

“It seems so to me now,” said Agatha; “but you must remember the excited state of my feelings, and my belief that you were triumphing over me, and that my conscience accused me of having *wished* to do the very action I feared you would suspect. I cannot explain, Katharine. Try to imagine my position for yourself. You know what I did; I told

you a downright falsehood when you asked me what letters I had received."

Agatha paused for a moment, but Katharine was too much astonished to speak.

"The letter was not really lost, Katharine. It was found by Philip Thorpe, who from a distance had seen me looking for it. He thought it belonged to me, for the direction had been partly effaced by the water. Of course I did not deceive him."

"You have the letter still?" asked Katharine, eagerly.

But Agatha did not answer the question, but went on, as if the course of her words had been laid down in her mind, and she could not alter it.

"At first I intended to give it to you, at least I thought I did, but it was so difficult to speak. And I delayed it, and it became more and more difficult, and I grew cowardly. And then, oh! Katharine,"—here Agatha's voice changed, and she spoke with passionate rapidity—"I learnt to love you, and I *could* not make you hate me, by telling you of my meanness and treachery. I wanted your love, but I dared not show my own love for you, knowing my guilt towards you. I tried sometimes to tell you, but my courage failed. I dreaded so to lose the little measure of liking you gave me. Now it is told, and you must hate me: if you can hate any one, you must hate and despise me. Say what you will to

me, you can never reproach me as I reproach myself."

"I begin to see," said Katharine, slowly, drawing a long breath, "how often I have been puzzled by your manner; but oh, Agatha! why could you not trust me to find excuses for you?"

"I feared to lose your *respect*, Katharine; and that I must have lost," said Agatha.

"But the letter?" pursued Katharine, eagerly, hardly heeding Agatha's words.

"It is here;" and Agatha drew from her pocket the soiled, torn, faded, long-withheld letter, and placed it in Katharine's hand. A vivid crimson rose to Katharine's face; with impulsive haste she broke the seal, and ran her eye rapidly along the lines of well-remembered handwriting.

Agatha thought she had forgotten her presence, and she half turned away, fancying it scarcely right to intrude upon her overpowering emotion.

But Katharine checked herself: a hasty glance at the purport of the letter, and then it was refolded, too precious to be lingered over until she was in perfect solitude. Her first remark was different from any Agatha had anticipated, in the many imaginary scenes she had pictured between Katharine and herself. It was,—

"What must he have thought of me?"

Agatha saw that she was not the prominent person in Katharine's thoughts: even resentment against

her was swallowed up in feelings which concerned another.

Again she resolved to leave the room, but she could not bear to retire without ascertaining in some degree how far she was despised and condemned.

“Katharine, I don’t ask for your forgiveness ; but you will believe, at least, that I am sincerely grieved and miserable ? ”

“I know you must be,” said Katharine, simply ; “and all along, you must have been even more miserable. How could you live all this time—*years*—without telling any one ? ”

“You *cannot* understand, Katharine ; you never could have acted as I did,” said Agatha, in a hopeless tone.

“I don’t know,” said Katharine, thoughtfully. “I dare say I might have done the same thing, but I could not have kept the secret : it would have killed me, I think.”

“And you must hate me for it,” said Agatha.

“Hate you, Agatha ! how can you think it ? I cannot at this moment say whether I shall think of you as I used to do : I am too much stunned and startled. But pray do not imagine that I cannot make excuses for you, and pity you for what you must have suffered.”

Agatha turned even paler than she had been before. Pride like hers is not quelled at once, and she could



not bear to be pitied : it would have been better, she thought, to hear herself severely rebuked, mercilessly judged.

“Make excuses!” she said: “is it come to this? Oh, Katharine, do not try to be kind to me, and rack your brains to find excuses for what is inexcusable. I can never regain your respect through your compassion. Bad as I am, I cannot bear to receive anything but justice. Even just blame is better than false praise coined out of your own goodness.”

“If we had only justice to look to, who might stand?” said Katharine, in a low grave voice. “We must all hope for mercy in the end.”

It was so seldom that she made any allusion of the kind, that the words struck Agatha forcibly, and she remained silent. She felt how much was still unhumbled in her, how hard, how very hard it was, now when her confession was made, to bear its results in a right spirit. Something of grandeur had sustained her unconsciously in making it: there seemed something almost noble in speaking out at last, after having been silent so long: but now that feeling was gone, and she realized how base, and weak, and contemptible she must appear in Katharine’s sight, and bitter as it might be to depend upon pity and goodness, yet they were far more than she deserved.

“You are better than I am, Katharine; I am a weak, miserable creature, but I had valued your

esteem, and it is most painful to me to know that from a sense of Christian duty you are trying to think gently of me. You don't know, you cannot imagine, what it is to come down, and be dependent upon the leniency of one's fellow-creatures, and not upon their justice."

"It must be strange," said Katharine; but she could not fully enter into the case. She had always been anxious herself about the good opinion of others, but she had never dreamt of appealing solely to their strict justice.

For some minutes there was silence between the sisters. Katharine's thoughts turned naturally to her letter, and to Marmaduke Wentworth, and yet it seemed unkind not to say something comforting to Agatha.

Agatha herself was longing to know that she was forgiven, yet shrinking inconsistently from owing her forgiveness to Katharine's goodness of disposition instead of to some redeeming quality in her own character. Katharine's simplicity and candour were a good discipline for her. Had Katharine, in her delight at receiving her letter, passed lightly over the fault committed in its detention, or had she, in indignation, burst into a torrent of exaggerated reproaches, which she would probably have contradicted afterwards, ashamed of her fury, Agatha would not have experienced the thorough humiliation which she now did.

“Agatha, may I say exactly what I think?” said Katharine, after some time had passed.

“Certainly; I desire nothing else.”

“I am thinking that perhaps this, which now seems so sad and strange, may bring about a better understanding between us, than there has ever been. You think a great deal about *respect*, and I do not know whether I can ever give you so much as I did before, but I think I shall give you more love; for I know now that we can feel for each other’s failings, and I used to think that you had so little weakness you could not understand mine. Let us make allowances for each other, and not be above having excuses made for us by a sister. I shall like you much more for your frankness than I ever did for anything else.”

“You are too good to me, Katharine; but still it is very painful, and I cannot imagine that you will ever excuse me really, or be able to love me again.”

“I shall love you if you are open with me,” said Katharine; “and, as for excuses, I will not deceive you. At present it seems to me that you acted very wrongly, and that though what you did was natural enough, considering your feelings at the time, such feelings could not have existed unless you had been indulging bad thoughts before—you do not mind my talking in this way?”

“No; I prefer it.”

“Well, I will blame you as much as you like,”

continued Katharine, in a lighter tone. "I think that your silence was both proud and weak, but you must have suffered so much since, that I am astonished at your strength of mind in bearing to keep it. Oh, dear! I cannot explain what I mean; you seem at once so strong and so weak; but still, Agatha, I want you to understand that I think your character is a great one after all, and some time, perhaps, I may respect you as much as ever; and if you will only be open and sisterly, we shall be very good friends."

"I will try to learn of you, Katharine," said Agatha, meekly; "and now please say that you forgive me."

"Dear Agatha, let us not talk of forgiving: surely you cannot doubt that I have done that," said Katharine. "How could it be otherwise when I need so much forgiveness myself?"

"And, Katharine," said Agatha, but the words came forth with a great effort, as if from the depths of her soul, "will you pray for me, that I may be humble?"

"Most surely I will: we all require each other's prayers," said Katharine, reverently.

Agatha was silent: she felt more than ever how greatly she had mistaken Katharine's character: how could she have considered her so light and frivolous, when every word and every gesture now showed her that Katharine's feelings had all the earnestness and solemnity which she had believed her own to possess,

but which, alas ! she ought rather to have striven to gain ? How could she have been so alive to her own fancied merits, so dead to Katharine's real ones ?

All this, though natural enough, was a little exaggerated, for Agatha's principles really were high, notwithstanding her great faults ; and when she tried to shut her eyes to them she was intensely miserable ; and with respect to her not having done justice to Katharine, there was in fact a considerable change, more than any one suspected, in Katharine herself, since the days when she had first been condemned for frivolity.

“ I will go now,” said Agatha, “ and leave you to read that letter in peace : ” she could not help wincing at the mention of it. “ One thing more, Katharine : you will believe that the fancy I had in those days—about Mr. Wentworth, I mean—has long passed away.”

“ I quite believe it,” said Katharine, with a smile ; “ indeed, I don't think you ever cared about him truly.”

“ And you do,” said Agatha ; but she checked herself immediately : she had no right to ask for Katharine's confidence.

Katharine blushed brightly, but said nothing. Agatha was turning away, when she called her back, saying, half playfully,—

“ We ought to kiss and be friends.”

Agatha went up to the bedside, and the sisters

kissed each other. It was a long, fervent kiss : both felt that much was expressed in it, and Agatha secretly vowed that she would never rest until she had, in some degree, repaired the mischief she had wrought to Katharine and Marmaduke Wentworth ; not as any atonement for her fault, but as a pledge of her repentance.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE READING OF THE LETTER.—SISTERLY TALK.

AND now Katharine could at length return to the perusal of her precious letter ; she had commanded herself before Agatha, but now tears rushed to her eyes, and she could scarcely be calm enough to read the actual words, for very joy at finding that she had not been forgotten.

Her faith had not been without foundation ; the enthusiastic belief in Marmaduke Wentworth's truth, which had succeeded her transient wavering and depression last night, had been no mere romantic fancy ; and yet she trembled to think how near she had been to the verge of a precipice—a precipice down which how many women are continually falling, the victims of pique, weariness, and want of trust !

Had she accepted Mr. Percival, and afterwards received this letter—the idea made her shudder, and she thanked God that she had been made aware of the real state of her heart by what had seemed so trifling an incident.

A common tune whistled by a fisher-boy had awakened Katharine to a sense of her true feelings : what in this world of ours may we presume to call trivial and purposeless ?

Mr. Wentworth's letter was dated from London ; it commenced abruptly thus :—

“ I do not know whether I ought to offer excuses for presuming to write to you ; but a change in my circumstances has made me alter my determination to keep silence.

“ I now make a confession to you which I have not considered myself justified in making hitherto ; but which you must have long suspected. You do not require to be told that I love you, Katharine (you must let me call you so for this once) ; I have betrayed myself too often for you to have any doubt on that point. You must also have gathered from my manner, that only serious obstacles prevented my speaking in words sufficiently forcible to call for a reply. How stern a self-command I had to place over myself to resist the temptation of putting an end to my doubts, and of entreating you to say the words which I fondly hoped and trusted you would have said, I need scarcely tell you.

“ You know that I had no money ; that my prospects were uncertain ; that I was not in a position to ask your father to give you to me.

“ It was wrong in me, knowing this all the time,



to hover about you as I did; but for some time I tried to delude myself into thinking that I did not love you, and that there was no danger in our intimacy; but at last I was roused to a conviction of the real state of the case as regarded myself; and I had some slight hope that it was the same with you.

“ You remember my leaving Coverdale and returning after a short absence? Well, during the interval I discovered that the plans I had formed for putting myself in a position which would authorise my speaking to your father must be cast aside, and by an obstacle which I could not mention, even to justify myself in your eyes. Honour, family feeling, and gratitude, all forbade me to speak out; I could not tell you the cause of my apparent caprice; I could not account to you for my sudden coolness and constraint, after having expressed to you in manner as much of my affection as could be expressed in that way. I left you intensely unhappy, yet not utterly without hope that you had seen my love, and not been displeased by it, and that you would trust me till some future time should come when I might explain myself.

“ I went away resolved to depend upon my own resources; to work hard in any way, however distasteful, which might enable me at some time to return and openly offer you my love. I was not altogether without friends, and I succeeded in ob-

taining employment, of a kind which promised to grant me the power of in future carrying out my ideas, and but for the events of the last few days you would not have heard of me until I could have asked you formally at your father's hands. I knew this was a great risk, for how could I expect you to remain faithful to a memory when I had not even told you that I loved you? Still, Katharine, I *did* hope; and I am not afraid that you will think me presumptuous in saying so, I have such an intuitive certainty that we understand each other.

“The events of the last few days have changed my schemes; I need not dwell upon them; all England knows the shame that has fallen upon my family.

“I believe it would be false feeling in me to imagine myself involved in my uncle's disgrace: it is not that which makes me renounce my hope of winning you; I know enough of you and your father to believe that you would judge me solely on my own merits. You will conclude now why I was silent before I parted from you; I had become aware then of the frauds which deterred me from engaging in the course of life which was proposed to me. I learned what would have been required of me, and I left my uncle and renounced all claim upon his notice and his help. Yet it was not for me to publish his faults; I could not confide even to you that which now makes his name ring with

infamy. Should I, whom he had protected from childhood, whom he had educated, and for whom he had even a sort of affection, be the first to denounce him? You will feel at once that I could not do it, and but for this crash you would never have heard me hint at the subject. Perhaps it would have been better to have spoken, and to have warned those who were being deceived to their ruin, but I cannot pretend to such Spartan excellence.

“ Well, the crash has come; my aunt and cousin are unprovided for, and I am the most fitting person in the world to offer them protection and support. My uncle will live abroad, but they will remain with me, and, so far as I can prevent it, they shall never touch one farthing of the ill-gotten gains that it might be possible to reserve for them.

“ And now you may ask why I am writing all this to you. Partly because it is now in my power to explain the inconsistency of my former conduct, partly because I cannot put off the prospect of winning you to an indefinitely distant period, without saying I love you. My first duties are towards my aunt and cousin, and with them depending upon me, years must pass before I dare think of undertaking other responsibilities; and by that time you may be out of my reach, and I may never have an opportunity of letting you know my feelings.

“I am not doing this with an idea of gaining any promise from you, Katharine, or of binding your future in the smallest degree ; but if, as I have dared to believe, your heart has in any measure responded to mine, give me the satisfaction of knowing it. It will animate all my exertions, and I will trustingly leave the future to take care of itself. I do not ask you to send me a single line that your parents may not see and approve : a simple assurance that you understand my present motives and my past equivocal conduct, and that I was not mistaken in thinking you had some little regard for me, is all I wish, all I would at present receive from you. I am content to live for years on one sweet remembrance and one vague hope ; you meanwhile being left free as air.

“Surely I am not asking too much ? Surely, Katharine, you will not refuse me one line. It would be unwise in me to dwell upon my feelings, to tell you how I was at first attracted by you, and how I could not help loving you. I must check myself, as I have done many a time when words rose to my lips, and I longed to express something of that which was passing in my heart, or rather *resting* there, as it rests still, and will, I believe, ever rest. I do not wish this to be considered as what is called a ‘love-letter ;’ it is a plain record of facts, business-like and dry, and I have no right to send you anything else. The conclusion must correspond

with it and be cold and tame. Yet I may, without fear of offence or misconstruction, ask you to believe me,

“Yours *faithfully*,

“MARMADUKE WENTWORTH.”

And to this letter, which asked so little, a mere line of approval and sympathy, no answer had ever been returned; and more than three years and a half had passed away. What must Marmaduke Wentworth have thought?

Katharine, from her knowledge of his character, tried to imagine what had been his feelings and his conclusions. At first she thought he had waited patiently, for he was neither impetuous nor exacting, and she knew he would find reasons for her silence without accusing her of indifference; but when time had elapsed and he could no longer suppose that anything but her will prevented her answering his letter, a reaction would naturally take place.

He would blame himself for having written, he would believe that he had been mistaken in her, he would cease to form plans for the future in which she had any share, he would strive to cast her from his heart, and in time, perhaps, he would succeed in doing so. Not quickly though; Katharine trusted too implicitly in his sincerity to believe that he would easily forget her.

But still he was a man, and man's faith she had

an instinctive sense was not like woman's; he would not go on trusting as she had done without something tangible.

And how had he passed those years since that letter was written? Had he failed or succeeded in the "battle of life?"—had time healed his disappointment at her seeming neglect, and had he filled up the blank she had caused in his heart?—had he collected together his shattered affections and bestowed them upon another object?—found consolation perhaps in the love of that gentle cousin he had vowed to protect?

Katharine shrank from this thought as treason to him, and yet what could be more natural? She tried to persuade herself that it was better so, and that she was glad he had found comfort and happiness, and yet an under-current of thought still assured her that Marmaduke Wentworth had not forgotten her. He *might* have trusted her in spite of her apparent disregard.

But against this belief rose the wonder why he had never written again. No; it was too clear; he had given her up. Ah! the letter which in the first instant of possession had caused Katharine such rapturous joy, seemed in the end to bring more grief than gladness with it.

And yet, would she rather have been left without it? Oh, no! let none who have ever known the delight of certainty after years of watching and

waiting, the blessed conviction of not having trusted in a vain shadow of their own creating, doubt the answer to such a question. The knowledge that at least he had once loved her, the sight of the long-hoped-for words, the very touch of the paper on which his hand had rested in forming them, gave to Katharine many a moment of exquisite happiness; in spite of sorrow for his past disappointment, and doubt of his present regard, Katharine would not have changed that letter for any treasure this world could have given her.

Perhaps at this time her strongest wish was to confide to some one the fact that Marmaduke Wentworth had not acted by her in the trifling, inconsistent way of which he had been suspected by many. She felt more than ever the want of Hester, not only that she might have enjoyed her sympathy, but because she knew that Hester had never had full confidence in that truth and goodness which she had yet refrained from questioning.

In the absence of Hester her thoughts turned to her mother, and she would have had no hesitation in showing her the letter, had not a recollection suddenly struck her.

For Agatha's sake she must preserve strict secrecy on the subject; she could not tell the history of the letter; she could not even explain her conduct to Mr. Wentworth, if chance were ever to bring them together again, without exposing Agatha's deceit and

treachery ; and she was too honourable and high-minded to dream for one moment of doing this. It was true that Agatha had asked for no concealment, but Katharine could estimate sufficiently the violent control she must have exerted over herself to enable her to make a confession so galling to her self-esteem, to think of desiring her to push the sacrifice still further. Notwithstanding the wrong done to herself, she could feel for Agatha's misery, and enter somewhat into her position ; it was only when she thought of Marmaduke Wentworth that anything like resentment stirred her spirit, and checked the kindness with which she strove to excuse Agatha's fault, and even to some extent admire the bravery which she had at last exerted. It was long before Katharine could sufficiently compose her thoughts to dress and go downstairs, but her lateness occasioned no remark, as every one was supposed, on this morning, to be making up for the lost sleep of last night.

It was a sultry, oppressive day for the time of year, and the sea looked dull and leaden. Neither Agatha nor Katharine went out of doors ; both were rather fatigued, and the latter had a nervous dread of encountering Mr. Percival.

She believed that he would not stay long in Brackencliff after receiving her letter, and doubtless he would call to take leave of her mother ; but it would be much easier for her to avoid him in such



a case, than if she were to see him on the sands or in the street. It was from no girlish bashfulness that she shrank from meeting him, but she thought it would be better for both of them to let a little time pass before renewing their acquaintance.

As she had expected, Mr. Percival called during the morning, but she had happily escaped to her own room some time before he arrived, and she did not leave it until long after he had departed.

“What have you been doing all the morning, Katharine?” asked Mrs. Rivers, when they all met at dinner; “Mr. Percival has been here; he is obliged to go away suddenly, he says. I was sorry no one was in the room but Agatha, to say good-bye to him; he has been so friendly, and he seems almost to belong to us. Agatha went to look for you in the dining-room; I thought you were sitting there drawing, but she could not find you: and it seems she was so careful of you, she would not venture into your bedroom, thinking you had gone to rest after last night’s worry.”

“I thought Katharine was tired this morning,” said Agatha.

Katharine gave her a grateful look: she felt sure that Agatha had suspected the truth and tried to spare her any annoyance.

“We must not go on in this way though, Kate, thinking you delicate,” said Mrs. Rivers, “and you seemed quite well a day or two ago; but I must say, my

poor child, you don't look very bright just now ; however, last night accounts for everything. I shall be glad to see Agatha look less like a ghost."

"It is so warm to-day, mamma," said Katharine ; "and I am sure I am not delicate."

"And Agatha has had enough to make her look pale, I am certain," said Caroline ; "mamma, the Forrests want us to go with them this afternoon, to see ——, but never mind now."

"Speak out, Caroline," said Agatha, with a dash of bitterness in her tone ; "they want you to go to Greymore to see the ruin the fire has made. I know people who like excitement, are fond of visiting such scenes. It will be quite an attraction to the Brackencliff visitors for some time to come."

"It can scarcely be a pleasure to your brothers and sisters to look at such a sight, Agatha," said Mrs. Rivers. "Do you really want to go there, Caroline?"

"It was not for seeing the place exactly, that I cared," said Caroline ; "only the Forrests are a merry party, and they said it was an object for a walk or ride ; we were to have had donkeys, and to drink tea at the Forrests' afterwards. Minnie Forrest really is a nice girl, mamma, and has a good deal in her ; and Miss Forbes, the governess, is a charming person, and quite one of themselves."

"Pray, do not object to Caroline's wish," said Agatha, in a sincere manner, as if repenting her

previous speech; "I want you all to understand how I feel about this—this event," she added, looking round, and speaking with some hesitation; "it is of course a great grief to me, but not so overpowering as you imagine. I can feel that there are things in the world of more value than an old ancestral seat and an ancient name, and I know that I was wrong in setting my heart upon living at Greymore all alone, regardless of those who belonged to me. I do not wish to make any efforts to restore it. Hazel Bank is now my *real* and *only* home."

Mrs. Rivers rose from her seat, walked to the other end of the table, and kissed Agatha. Though timid almost to reserve, she was naturally impulsive, and the moment a single advance was made to her, every particle of coldness was dissolved; and Agatha's words just now, though simply spoken and without any pretension to unusual affection, were sufficient to break the ice which had always, more or less, formed a barrier between them. Agatha in sorrow, Agatha acknowledging herself in the wrong, was a person to be loved, and the heart of the tender mother readily expanded to take her to herself, as one of her own children.

Nothing further was said about the expedition to Greymore at the time, but in the course of the afternoon Caroline gained her mother's permission, and the younger members of the family left the house to peace and silence.

Mrs. Rivers went, according to her frequent custom, to pass the afternoon on the bench, where Katharine had been sitting last night, alternately reading and watching the sea.

Agatha and Katharine found themselves together in the little drawing-room; they were not exactly at ease in each other's society, and yet neither liked to withdraw. Perhaps they felt that any kind of implied estrangement would widen the breach between them, and put a stop to the friendship, which, after all that had happened, they still both desired. The kiss in the morning had been intended to express perfect reconciliation; but yet, unless carefully prevented, misunderstanding might arise between them from the most trivial causes, as matters stood at present.

Katharine felt that, on her side, much delicacy was required in her treatment of Agatha, that the painful sense of having made so full a confession might not be too oppressive; whilst Agatha, on her part, had to struggle hard against an inclination to wrap herself up in reserve, and to shrink from Katharine's society.

Katharine was reclining on a couch near the window, but Agatha, who had no plea of delicate health, would not indulge herself so far; and notwithstanding the oppressive heat of the day, and her actual weariness, continued to sit bolt upright in one of the uncomfortable lodging-house chairs,

poring over some accounts relating to the mining concerns, which Philip had some days ago begged her to examine.

All recollection of Philip was banished from her mind as much as possible, but it occurred nevertheless quite frequently enough to interfere with her employment, and she sighed in the vain effort to fix her attention.

“Agatha, I wish you would not trouble yourself with those affairs this afternoon,” said Katharine; “I am sure it is too warm for real work.”

“But if one does not work, one must think,” said Agatha.

“Try to let yourself go for once,” said Katharine, laughing; “you don’t understand the process though, I am afraid. You must learn to amuse yourself.”

“I can understand being amused when the mind is at ease,” said Agatha; “but when one is harassed by gloomy, remorseful thoughts, amusement seems impossible and out of place.”

“On the contrary, one then requires it most,” said Katharine.

“To stifle grief and repentance,” said Agatha, hastily.

“Oh, no; I do not mean that. I only mean when one is thinking of future difficulties, or dwelling upon what is irrevocable. I don’t mean that we should not lament our faults for their own sake, but then there are so many things mixed up with them, their con-

sequences and so on, which no effort of ours can mend, that perhaps we only harm ourselves by dwelling upon them so very much. And then I think we should try to turn to something, not amusing exactly, perhaps, but something to engage our attention without effort. Now, doing these accounts only wearies you, and cannot possibly do you any good."

"No, not absolute good," said Agatha, doubtfully; "but yet when one is guilty and miserable, there is more satisfaction in a hard duty than in an agreeable occupation."

Katharine shook her head: "I am afraid you would like to do penance, Agatha," she said.

And Agatha started, for she knew that she was inclined to fancy that severe discipline and strict self-denial might lighten the load of her errors. She did not say anything for some time: at last she spoke suddenly:

"Katharine, I have a great deal to weigh me down, even more than you know of; but, confining my troubles to one point, the unhappiness I have caused you, surely there is enough in that alone to make me wretched. I am aware that whatever may be the subject of that letter, you will not like to answer it now, when so much time has passed, and one of your reasons would be the fear of exposing me, but this you must not think of for one moment. I would write to him myself, if I could do so without compromising you in any way."

“Do not, I entreat you,” said Katharine, in alarm ; “he may not now care, and we do not know where he now is. I beg, Agatha, that you will never mention this again.”

“I feel that it is no use,” said Agatha, with a heavy sigh, “and this increases my self-condemnation, the consideration that my repentance has come too late. I have watched you closely enough to know that you would have been happier if you had received that letter at the proper time. You cannot recommend me to cease mourning over my faults, or to seek for anything to relieve my sorrow.”

“It is very difficult for me to advise you,” said Katharine, “and I am quite too sensible of the wrong you have done, the—yes, the harm you have caused Mr. Wentworth and myself, to recommend your forgetting your faults, but still the present has duties as well as the past.”

“I am performing them,” said Agatha, pointing to the papers before her.

“No ; you are wearying yourself, and harassing your brain, when it needs rest. This is not the way to fit yourself for duties which may come upon you : you will only make yourself ill, or, at any rate, nervous and irritable. You will be inclined to show yourself cross and ungracious, when you should be cheerful and agreeable. There ; never say I cannot lecture.”

“Cheerful and agreeable,” repeated Agatha, as if

she were thinking ; “ you are cheerful and agreeable, Katharine ; does duty make you so ? ”

Katharine blushed.

“ No, I suppose not. I am naturally light-hearted, but still I consider it my duty to keep so. Even for me it is not always easy, and I know I often fail.”

“ Then you amuse yourself to restore the tone of your mind, when you are failing through too great thought,” said Agatha.

“ You are making my words seem ridiculous, Agatha.”

“ I assure you I did not intend it,” said Agatha ; “ I really wish you to tell me what you mean.”

“ Well, amusing oneself is scarcely the expression,” said Katharine, “ what I mean is, that we should not let ourselves become unnerved and over-weary, and try to atone for our faults by thinking about them so continually as to unfit ourselves for present duties. But really I have said all this before.”

“ But how to get the amusement you spoke of,” persisted Agatha.

“ I cannot tell you exactly,” said Katharine ; “ it is different with different people, I suppose ; but poring over accounts is not one of the ways, and reading a pretty, fanciful story is. Look at this book of Anderson’s *Fairy Tales*, Agatha, and don’t think me childish, if I ask you to read one of them aloud to me. You can think as much, or as little about it, as you like, but unless you are very unlike me, it will



drive away weary thoughts, much better than those accounts, and refresh you, so that you can attend to them another time."

"I am so afraid of self-indulgence," said Agatha.

"I don't think that is one of your besetting sins," said Katharine, with a faint smile; "and it seems to me, though I am not at all well qualified to argue on such a subject, that there may be such a thing as being perversely hard with oneself, a sort of morbid pride in denying oneself all the little pleasures that come in one's way. I know I have felt it sometimes, and afterwards, I always found out that I had been in a wrong state of mind."

Agatha made no reply, but took the book, and commenced reading.

Whether either she or Katharine paid much attention to the story, notwithstanding the theory of the latter, is doubtful, but still in time a dreamy kind of interest arose in their minds, and, at all events, the reading suggested to them various remarks to be made, which had not too close a reference to their personal concerns.

Agatha had said truly that Katharine did not know how many things she had to weigh her down, or rather to agitate her, she should have said, for when she thought of Philip Thorpe, even though firmly resolved to say that to him which would probably destroy his love for her, there was yet a glimmer of joy in the knowledge that she was at pre-

sent dear to him, which caused her heart to beat high, and at occasional moments overpowered her dreary sense of oppression. As the day waned, and Philip's arrival grew nearer, her excitement became painful and almost visible. Every sound made her start, and her voice trembled, so that Katharine's attention was aroused, yet still Agatha read on, and Katharine could not help feeling, that even now, there was much about her which she could not understand.

The street-door opened at last, and some one ascended the stairs : Katharine, who expected her mother, did not observe the difference of tread ; but Agatha's acute hearing directly told her that Philip had come. Every footfall seemed to sound through her, yet she continued reading, till Katharine said :

“ Stop, Agatha ; surely that is not mamma's step.”

She looked up as she spoke, and marked the changing colour on Agatha's face ; she had never seen her blush before, and she was struck with the alteration of her countenance ; it was softer, nay, there was something more youthful in its appearance.

Before she could make any further observation Philip came in, and his demeanour only confirmed her rising suspicions.

He spoke to her and shook hands with her first, having previously given a quick glance at Agatha ; he then went up to her, and sat by her, saying something in a low voice which Katharine could not hear.

Agatha's blush had vanished, and she was now cold and even stiff in manner, so much so that but for Philip's intuitive knowledge of her real character, he might have fancied her indifferent. He was looking ghastly pale, and the injury sustained by his hair, eyebrows, and whiskers, during his reckless efforts the preceding night, imparted to his face a degree of oddity, which might have appeared ludicrous in the eyes of one who was ignorant of what he had passed through.

Katharine had an impression that she was *de trop*, yet it was so new and almost absurd to consider Agatha and Philip in the light of lovers, that she could not make up her mind to leave the room.

It was a considerable relief when Mrs. Rivers entered, and began to question Philip about the effects of the fire, and also concerning his own shoulder, which had been bruised and slightly scorched. Agatha had been making the same queries previously, but until Mrs. Rivers came in, his answers had been vague, as if he were thinking of something else.

He had no very cheering intelligence to communicate: the greater part of the house was a mere shell; some of the heavier furniture had been destroyed, but happily very little that belonged to the Maynards; in short, the substance of his information was the same as Agatha had received before.

“I ought to have written to the Maynards,” she exclaimed; “they can never return there.”

“I have written,” said Philip; “as I was on the spot during the whole time of the fire, I thought I was better qualified than any one to give an account of it to Mr. Maynard. Though, after all, he is not much concerned; he has only lost some worthless knick-knacks: all he has to do is to look out for another house.”

“It was quite right though that he should be told at once,” said Mrs. Rivers, “for he may be put to some inconvenience. I hope you wrote a very proper, polite letter, Philip.”

“As polite as I could,” returned Philip, “but Mr. Maynard knows me, and would not expect many fine-sounding regrets. Between ourselves, he will not be a great loss to the neighbourhood.”

“I wrote to your uncle to-day, Philip,” said Mrs. Rivers; “I dare say he will come down as soon as he can, and see what is to be done.”

“There is not much to do,” said Agatha; “I shall have to bear the loss of the rent of the house, that is all. Plenty of people will be willing to take the land, I dare say.”

“But the pleasure ground and park,” began Mrs. Rivers.

“All must be turned into fields, I suppose,” said Agatha, with a sigh; “practically speaking, it may perhaps be an advantage.”

“There are many things to be considered,” began Philip, eagerly; “there must be a house somewhere——” he checked himself suddenly, and looked at Agatha.

She rose in some confusion to carry her desk and papers to another part of the room, saying something about the table being wanted for tea. Some of the papers fell, and Philip picked them up and followed her to a side table.

“When am I to speak to you, Agatha?” he said. “Are we never to be alone?”

“We will go on the sands after tea,” said Agatha.

“*We*? Cannot you get rid of Katharine?”

Amidst her distress, Agatha could scarcely help smiling at “Time’s changes:” Philip speaking of getting rid of Katharine!

“Depend upon me: I will walk with you alone,” she said, in a low, firm voice.

“We are a small party to-night,” remarked Mrs. Rivers, as they sat down to tea. “The children have gone to the Forrests’, and Caroline seems to prefer their juvenile society to ours.”

“Not so very juvenile, mamma,” said Katharine; “Minnie Forrest is nearly as old as Caroline, though she is rather boyish in some of her ways. But I believe she and Caroline sympathize together about the dulness of Brackencliff.”

“Have you been staying in the house all day?” asked Philip, after a short pause.

“These idle girls have,” said Mrs. Rivers, “but I am sure a walk would do them good: are you in a great hurry to go home to-night, Philip?”

“Oh, no; I have plenty of time for a walk on the sands, if you will go out after tea,” he returned.

“Well, then, suppose we all go,” said Mrs. Rivers; and Agatha and Katharine agreed.

## CHAPTER IX.

## PHILIP AND AGATHA.

“AND this is all, Agatha,” said Philip; “you have no other reason for giving me up?”

“None,” answered Agatha; “surely it is enough.”

They were walking on the sands at a considerable distance from Brackencliff, having outstripped Mrs. Rivers and Katharine some time ago; and Agatha had just related to Philip the same story as she had done to Katharine in the morning, and had told it in the same impassive way and unmoved voice, as if she had learned the words and could not use any others.

And Philip had listened in silence, betraying as little feeling as herself.

But his apparent apathy was over now, and his only reply to Agatha's last speech was to draw her closely to him, saying in passionate tones:

“Then you are still mine—mine for ever!”

“Oh, Philip, you do not, you cannot understand,” said Agatha, shrinking from him: “I am guilty of the very thing you most detest—falsehood. Did you not say you valued me for my truth? Did you

not cast away Katharine from your thoughts, because she deceived you?"

"That was different," said Philip; "you have not deceived me; and you are Agatha, and she was Katharine."

"Such reasons cannot satisfy me, and they sound childish," said Agatha; "you once loved Katharine, and when you ceased to approve her, you ceased to love her; you can no longer approve me, and I could not bear to receive a love which was not founded on esteem, if such a thing were possible. I should scorn a pitying, compassionate love," she added, drawing herself up with her old proud look.

"Agatha," said Philip, "you don't understand me. Let us sit down under these cliffs, and I will try to explain why I love you, though surely you can *feel* that I do it, without explanation."

Agatha followed him, and seated herself on a smooth stone, out of reach of observation from the beach. But she waited for some minutes before Philip again spoke; perhaps she scarcely wished him to commence, for she *did* feel, in spite of herself, that he still loved her.

"It is so difficult to reason upon one's feelings," he said, at length; "I am quite satisfied myself with possessing them without knowing why; but if you cannot rest without being told—— Well, I think it is partly because, though you have failed in truth, and committed what I really consider a great fault,



yet you have confessed at last as few people would have done. There was no occasion to tell Katharine just now, and no occasion to tell me at all."

"I should indeed have been unworthy if I could have allowed you to love me whilst I kept such a thing concealed," said Agatha, quickly, her eye kindling and her cheek flushing. "I am bad enough, but not base enough for that; and I am sure you never could have thought of me had it been possible. I must have betrayed my nature to you had it been so utterly mean and contemptible. No; you would never have dreamt of me."

"No, I never could," said Philip; "and if by any chance I had been so far deceived in your character, and afterwards had learnt from another the concealment you had practised, no earthly power should have induced me to ally myself to such a woman. At the very altar I would have cast you off—I should have hated you. But you have acted quite differently. Can you not believe now that I am sincere in saying I still love you?"

"I think you are under a delusion," said Agatha, sadly; "you *must* be disappointed in me; I am not what you expected. Oh, I wish you would reproach me, treat me scornfully, angrily, passionately, for this leniency I cannot trust—cannot believe."

And Agatha rose, and in her agitation paced rapidly backwards and forwards on the smooth platform of sand under the rocks.

“What can I say?” said Philip; “how can I make it plain to you that I did not love you for any one particular thing, but for yourself altogether? You are Agatha, that is enough for me: there is not, to me, another in the world like you, and you suit me. I never thought you perfection, and one fault does not alter your whole nature.”

“But a fault so mean, so unlike anything you anticipated!”

“It sprang from a quality I knew you possessed—your pride,” said Philip; “I will blame you for that as much as you like, but I have loved you in spite of it, and shall not change now. I own I was shocked when you began to tell your history, but my great dread was that you had felt for another person what you say—what I know you feel for me. I am convinced now that you did not really care for Mr. Wentworth, and the relief from that dread makes everything else trifling.”

“Yet I suppose, I was jealous!” said Agatha doubtfully.

“But you did not really love him; you know you did not, Agatha.”

“I know it now,” said Agatha, slowly, “yet what could so have deluded me?”

“Your pride was mortified by finding that the only person you had condescended to notice preferred your sister,” said Philip.

“But with such pride can you love me?” asked Agatha.

“Yes, I can; though one may tremble to think to what lengths such a passion may lead. I always thought you strong for good or evil, Agatha, and I like a nature of that kind; in future, I know, the strength will be on the side of goodness.”

“But you can have no confidence in me,” said Agatha. “Can you—dare you—undertake to guide my steps?”

“I would dare anything when you speak to me in that way,” said Philip. “Oh, Agatha, cannot you see that your humility now may well give me confidence? You will not require *guiding*. You will be my help and comfort—my own *true wife*.”

“I am so uncertain,” persisted Agatha, though visions of happiness glittered before her eyes; “even now, I am giving way to pride. I cannot bear to think that you must esteem me less. Even in asking for guidance, I rebel against it. Philip, how can you love me when I am so perverse?”

“It is useless finding reasons,” said Philip, “and I was never good at hair-splitting and defining; I leave all such things to your former—what shall I call him?—he was famous in that way.”

“Spare me, Philip; I cannot bear a jest now.”

“I was wrong, I know,” said Philip, turning grave immediately; “and I do not mean to imply

that I think lightly of what you did. But I am not the person to judge you, and you are still my Agatha. If I spoke lightly, it was from joy at finding that my first suspicion was wrong; when you began to speak I was so afraid I had lost you! If you knew how I had been thinking of you all day—and then to hear you say there was an obstacle between us! I began to think that I had deluded myself, and yet—no, Agatha, it was real. You were true to your real self last night, as I was. There was no veil between us: we looked right down into each other's hearts."

"It was true," said Agatha, "but I can scarcely believe your feelings will last. You will always have to be excusing me to yourself, to keep alive your affection."

"You are growing provoking, Agatha; you are determined to disbelieve me."

"No: only afraid of believing," said Agatha; "you loved a character which is not mine."

"I tell you I loved *you*, Agatha," returned Philip, half angrily—"you yourself, both the good and the bad of you. If you can do the same, let us rest satisfied without searching for arguments to prove that we ought to love each other. Do you hear me, Agatha?—will you not take my view of the case?"

There was something in Philip's vehemence that almost frightened Agatha and took away her power

to reply, but her silence and her cast-down eyes were sufficiently satisfactory, and Philip drew her towards him and kissed her.

They were betrothed now, and Agatha as well as Philip felt that a subtle link, irresistible though incomprehensible, bound them together; she was aware she did not deserve such happiness, yet she must submit to it. Faulty as she might be, there was still something in her that corresponded to Philip's nature; some mysterious sympathy existing between them, which, once discovered, could not be set aside.

The conversation during the walk home was of too lover-like a style to bear description. Philip and Agatha, hard and cold as they seemed to many, were, it is to be presumed, as foolish as other people at this particular stage of their lives; and the evening was far advanced when they made their appearance at Brackencliff. They found some little confusion in the household: Mr. Rivers had just arrived from the C—— station in the rattling omnibus formerly avoided by Mr. Percival. He had unexpectedly discovered that he could give himself a few days' holiday, and had determined to take his family by surprise.

There had been so much to tell him about the misfortune at Greymore, and Mrs. Rivers had been so much occupied in arranging everything for his comfort, that there had been little time to speculate

upon the cause of the long delay of Philip and Agatha.

To the latter the rest of the evening passed like a dream ; she was conscious of receiving a warm greeting from her father, and of being treated by the whole family with unusual tenderness ; and she was also aware that Philip made no attempt to conceal his interest in her. She recollected afterwards, though at the time she scarcely noticed it, that when she returned to the room after removing her walking costume, room was made for her at the table next to Philip : she felt, too, that beneath all the general conversation which passed, there was an under-current of affectionate, considerate speeches addressed by Philip to herself. It seemed to her, besides, as if all were acquainted with her new position, though she could scarcely imagine how they had guessed it.

“ Are you going home to night, Philip ? ” asked Mr. Rivers, when the supper-tray had been removed. “ I don’t mean to speak inhospitably, but I have such frightful accounts of those roads of yours.”

“ I shall sleep at the inn,” said Philip, “ and go home early in the morning. I am not afraid of the roads though ; but I thought I might be late, so I told all the people to go to bed.”

“ Don’t go very early,” said Mr. Rivers, “ unless you are obliged, for I want to go with you, and have a look at the works, and I shall not choose to be disturbed at daylight. We must have a con-

sultation about various things, and Agatha must join us."

"You are thinking of the house, papa," said Agatha; "but I have no wishes about it now; it has perished, and I look upon it as gone for ever; it would be folly to try to restore it."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said her father, "for you are certainly not in a position to build or occupy a mansion of the kind. For some time to come, whatever capital you may realize should be employed in extending your mining operations; and if you also intend to buy in the scattered portions of the estate, you will have enough to do with your money."

"I have given up all my visions about the house," said Agatha, in a low tone.

"So much the better, my child; and you are bearing your trial, I can see, like a heroine; for it *is* a trial, I know. I feel it so, even myself; I know few things that would have shocked me so much as the news I heard to-night: I had a value for the old house as well as you, Agatha."

Agatha felt the sympathy her father's words implied; she was sitting near him, and she seized his hand with an impulsive movement unusual in her.

"Poor child!" said Mr. Rivers, pressing her hand in one of his, and smoothing her hair fondly with the other.

It was remarkable how sorrow had opened their

hearts to each other, and how readily Agatha's slightest advances were met by affection. She might have read a lesson respecting her former conduct from the way she was treated now.

"Will you go with me and Philip to-morrow, and have a discussion," said Mr. Rivers, "or would you rather not see the old place so soon?" But here Mrs. Rivers interfered:

"Agatha must not do anything of the kind; she has had as much excitement as is good for her, and the best thing she can do now is to go to bed immediately, and not get up again until I have given her my permission. If you look at her, Henry, you will see that she is not fit for anything of the kind you have been proposing."

It was true; Agatha's eyes were glittering, and her cheek brilliant with the hue of fever, doubly striking in her, on account of her usual paleness, and gifting her with a strange, unnatural beauty. Her brain was whirling and her knees trembling, and she acknowledged within herself that her stepmother was right. She rose at once, and saying, "I will be obedient," advanced to receive her father's kiss and good-night.

"No more good-nights; we will take them all for granted," said Mrs. Rivers, with a playful authority which she had never used to Agatha before, but in truth she had never felt before so completely that she was one of her children.



Katharine quietly went forward to accompany her sister from the room, for she saw her movements were faltering. Philip, with unusual politeness, held the door open for them to pass, and then, as if by a sudden impulse, followed them into the passage.

Katharine scarcely heard what he said, and if she had, he would not have heeded, but she was conscious that a good-night of uncommon length and tenderness passed between him and Agatha. Mrs. Rivers had no need to repeat her injunctions about staying in bed next morning, for Agatha could not get up when she tried. Her strength was utterly exhausted, and for several days a species of nervous fever confined her to her room. The fact of her engagement could not have been kept secret during this period, for Philip's anxiety about her would have betrayed it, had he not spoken of it openly.

It created, of course, great surprise in the family, but after a time they all of them recalled sundry suspicious circumstances, which might have prepared them for what had ensued, had it not been so much the habit to look upon Agatha as a person who could have nothing to do with love.

Katharine was unwearied in her attendance during Agatha's illness, and in her efforts to entertain her as she was recovering. By degrees, there grew up between the two a close, sisterly intimacy, and Agatha could show, without dread of being a hypocrite, the affection she had so long felt. Many things

became clear to her during the days of confinement to a sick-room; many of the ways in which her indomitable pride had shown itself: many respects in which she had failed to act as she ought to have done, by those who were bound to her by the nearest of ties: and many were the resolutions which she made, in all humility, against her besetting sins.

After her recovery, the family did not stay much longer at Brackencliff: it was thought that change inland might be as beneficial to her, as change to the sea had been to others; but before they left, various arrangements were made about affairs at Greymore. There was not much to settle with Mr. Maynard; he had merely taken the place from year to year, and as has been said before, he had sustained scarcely any damage through the fire.

Agatha persevered in her determination not to restore the house; it would have been an enormous expense to do so, and she now felt that the days of the Greymore Marchmonts were over; that a new era had arisen, and that it would be folly for her, with her unsettled fortune, to attempt to revive the ancient magnificence of feudal times. Philip Thorpe had infused some of his ideas into her mind, and she was beginning, like him, to consider that it would be a nobler use for her money to employ it in working to the utmost the newly discovered resources of her property, and in giving an example of enterprise in a direction that would be of more real benefit to her

country and her fellow-creatures, than to attempt a restoration of the system pursued by her ancestors.

Besides, she could see for herself, that times were changed; the Greymore estate had been broken up and divided, and even if she had succeeded in collecting together the scattered fragments, the old relation between owner and tenant had been destroyed; she felt that she would never be looked up to with the reverence which it had been customary to pay to the lords of Greymore; and she became sensible that the former interchange of kindly condescension on the one side, and boundless, unquestioning respect on the other, was amongst the things gone for ever. Even during the few years she had been absent, the "schoolmaster had been at Greymore;" Mechanics' Institutions and reading societies had sprung up in the neighbouring towns, and country people, though in a less degree than those of the manufacturing districts, had begun to form opinions of their own, or, at any rate, had roused to the knowledge that they had a right to think for themselves.

No : the old times could not return, when once the chain of connection had been broken, any more than mediæval pastimes can now be revived in unchanged form without giving rise to feelings of ridicule.

It might not be right perhaps, Agatha could not decide; people might be moving in a wrong direction, but one thing was certain, that they could not stand still.

Philip's great anxiety in all the communications he had with Mr. Rivers and Agatha, was to gain their assent to his immediately commencing to build a house.

When Agatha could go out again, he drove her to Greymore, and took her once more to the place he had shown her as a good site, and Agatha agreed readily enough that one should be built, but she persisted in saying that there was no occasion to hurry about it, and in shrinking from all Philip's allusions to the imagined building as their future home. The truth was, she could not bear to think of her own happiness whilst Katharine's fate was undecided; she could not but look upon herself as the cause of the cloud which rested upon Katharine's life; and that a cloud existed, she was convinced, notwithstanding Katharine's constant cheerfulness and her perfect forgiveness.

She could not rest or know true peace without doing something to restore the position in which Katharine and Mr. Wentworth had stood to each other; and she could not dare to anticipate that her own joy would be lasting, so long as Katharine's was blighted through her.

It was, perhaps, an overstrained notion, but Agatha had, as Katharine had said, an inclination to do penance, and she experienced a sort of satisfaction in mortifying her own wishes, even when possibly there was no occasion to do so.

But Philip was so sure of her real attachment that this seeming unwillingness to anticipate the time which he was anxious to hasten, did not greatly annoy him; he felt that they were still in the early days of their engagement, and that Agatha only resembled the generality of women, in declining to jump at once to the conclusion of marriage.

Long engagements, too, had been the fashion in his family, and he knew that without a delay of some months, he and Agatha would be considered highly rash and precipitate; and though he was not naturally inclined to defer to the prejudices of others, and did not see himself why, when people had made up their minds, they should not be married at once, he ceased to press the matter at present.

The world of Fairfield had much to say when the engagement became public, which was, of course, directly the Hazel Bank family returned, though no distinct announcement had been made about it. Mrs. James Thorpe was very eloquent on the subject, declaring that she had always expected the event. Miss Marchmont, with all her coldness and her haughtiness, was not a person to make up her mind to lead a single life, and as she had little chance of making a county connection, and was really "getting on—no longer a girl," she had at last determined to take up with Philip, who was, indeed, not at all a bad match for her, and had been very useful to her. As for Philip himself, it was assumed that he had per-

ceived Miss Marchmont's inclination towards him, and had yielded to her influence; he was, as everybody who remembered his affair with Katharine might know, soft to a degree, where women were concerned, and no doubt any girl who had taken the trouble might have married him long ago. Changed as he certainly was in many ways, in this, it was evident, he was just the same.

Of course all this never reached Agatha's ears, and if it had, she would have been beyond its annoyance. She was not accustomed to attach much weight to Sophia's opinions, though once upon a time some words of hers had stung her sharply. It was a different matter, however, as regarded the judgment to be passed upon her at the Grange, and she had a nervous anxiety to hear what Philip's mother would say. She knew that she did not approach Mrs. Thorpe's ideal of a wife for her son, and though she did not expect opposition, she was prepared to meet with a degree of coldness. But she was mistaken. Six months ago it might have been so, but in the interval Mrs. Thorpe's estimate of Agatha had considerably altered; the way she had acted during the time that illness had visited Hazel Bank, had placed her in a new and more *womanly* aspect before the eyes of Mrs. Thorpe; she had shown an amount of consideration and practical usefulness which had not been expected from her, and she no longer appeared to justify the epithet of "absent bookworm," which

had formerly been applied to her by the active mistress of the Grange.

Philip's taste was odd certainly, for Agatha did not seem likely to attract him, and yet she was beyond a doubt very good-looking, and had greatly improved since she had taken more pains about her appearance. And her stiffness had worn off very much lately, and when she liked, she could really be more agreeable than most people.

Altogether she would be rather a daughter-in-law to be proud of; and even with a house burnt down, and an estate scattered and partly lost, she was still Miss Marchmont of Greymore; a personage of much more consequence in the eyes of the world than Philip Thorpe. So, Philip's mother was satisfied, though puzzled, and Philip's father was content also, and checked all his perplexities by the wise consideration that fancies were unaccountable: it was quite impossible to guess what sort of people were likely to fall in love with each other.

Everything, therefore, was happily settled, and Philip and Agatha had only themselves to please about the time of their marriage. The sole reason for delay was the want of a house, but Philip set to work so energetically about building one, although it was autumn, that this difficulty was not likely to be of long continuance.

Philip, in the meantime, did not suffer his love-making to interfere with his other pursuits; his at-

tention was more than ever turned towards the mines, because Agatha's energies had taken the same direction; she was never weary of his plans and anticipations, and replied to his long, enthusiastic letters in a corresponding strain.

Frequent meetings alternated with the letters; Philip visited the Grange so often now, that his mother was almost jealous, and began to think she had been neglected during the former part of his residence at Greymore. But she could not long feel discontented; Agatha was daily becoming dearer to her, as the better side of her character unfolded itself under the genial dominion of affection and the influence of a lowly spirit. She was much more amiable, much readier to be interested about others, less wrapt up in herself, and less severe in her judgments; with her future father and mother-in-law she became cordial and sympathizing, and her changed behaviour had the peculiar charm which rests upon the frankness of the formerly reserved.

Agatha was in truth greatly improved; no longer fettered by a degrading secret, she could open her heart fearlessly to the softening and invigorating rays of friendship and appreciation; she could, while acknowledging in meekness her past faults, strive to become worthy of the praise which was so readily accorded her.

There were, it is true, moments of pride and rebellion, when she found it difficult to be open, and



to resist the inclination to enwrap herself in an isolating superiority: when she thought bitterly on the place she must have forfeited in Katharine's estimation, and chafed at the idea of being treated with indulgence and pity. But these were dark periods, which became gradually more and more rare as she learned to value properly the lessons which discipline and regret had taught her, and to own that a knowledge of her self-deceiving heart had not been too dearly purchased.

## CHAPTER X.

## ANOTHER CHRISTMAS AT THE GRANGE.

“YES, my dear, they say he keeps one of those gaming-tables at that German watering-place: I never can remember the name of it, though I met with it the other day in that book you lent me, by that man I never could like that you think so much about: the man who makes all the women bad or silly.”

Katharine laughed.

“Really, cousin Bessy, I have to supply all the names when we carry on a conversation. I suppose you mean Thackeray and Baden-Baden. But when did you hear this news? It is so long since any has reached us about Mr. Burton.”

“Mrs. Oakenshaw was talking of it at dinner, but you were at the other end of the table,” returned cousin Bessy; “I could not hear the whole myself, but I mean to ask her more about it as soon as I have an opportunity. I caught some words which interested me; and you must come too, and hear what she has to say: you will like to know something of your old friends.”

Katharine's heart gave a sudden leap. She knew, by cousin Bessy's look and manner, that when she spoke of "old friends," she only referred to one—could it be, that after so long an interval, she was about to hear something of him?

Her next speech, however, related merely to Mr. Burton.

"It is a sad end; I used to think he might have been a great man."

"He is a good-for-nothing," said cousin Bessy, emphatically; "leaving his wife and daughter to the care of a young man like Mr. Wentworth. A young man who has his own way to make in the world, to be hampered in this way with two women depending upon him—I have no patience, I declare. But see, your aunt has gone away, and Mrs. Oakenshaw is sitting by herself on the sofa; let us go and hear what she has to say."

This conversation took place at the Grange after dinner on Christmas Day, and cousin Bessy and Katharine had been standing at that very window where they had stood and talked four years ago.

Many changes had taken place since then, and yet the appearance of the party assembled did not present any very striking difference. Hester's face, it is true, had vanished from the group, and Henrietta Brooke's sparkling repartees and smooth-sounding speeches had given way to the boisterous merriment and "fast" manners of her sister Char-

lotte, her successor as the reigning niece at the Grange. Caroline Rivers, too, as a grown-up young lady, was taking a more prominent part in the circle, and Fanny had retired in a corresponding degree; the quaint vivacity of the child being merged in the sedate propriety of the school-girl at home for the holidays. She still often gave what her brothers called "cheeky answers;" but there was more restraint about her than formerly, showing that she had reached the awkward age.

With the exception of the substitution of Mr. Fenton for Mr. Manners, and the addition of Mrs. Oakenshaw and Grace—who were paying a visit to the Grange—the party was the same as it had been in former years.

Cousin Bessy moved towards the sofa, and Katharine followed; she was not ashamed of her interest in tidings of Mr. Wentworth, though she allowed cousin Bessy to make the first inquiries.

"You were talking at dinner, Mrs. Oakenshaw, about that bad man, Mr. Burton," she commenced.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Oakenshaw, as she made room for cousin Bessy on the sofa—"he has made a bad end; keeps a gaming-table, and one of the most disreputable in the place, I am told, which is saying a good deal, if all I have heard about Baden-Baden is true."

"It was not about him I cared so much to hear,

but about his poor wife and child. Katharine, my love, here is a nice low seat for you by the fire. Come here—you look quite cold.”

This was not the case; but Katharine understood cousin Bessy’s manœuvre to secure her a place where she could listen to Mrs. Oakenshaw’s information. She took the proffered seat, scarcely able to forbear smiling at the transparent nods and winks by which cousin Bessy still further explained her meaning.

“I saw Patty Burton myself not three months ago,” said Mrs. Oakenshaw, “when I went to London to consult Dr. Brandon about that sad affection of my fingers; I don’t think I have explained it to you: you don’t know, Bessy, what a cripple I have become; I am obliged to take Grace there about with me everywhere.”

“Was she in London with you?” asked cousin Bessy.

“No: Susan went with me there: well, as I was saying, I went to consult Dr. Brandon, and he told me ——”

“And you saw Patty Burton,” interrupted cousin Bessy, again.

“Really, Bessy, it is difficult to tell you anything, if you interrupt so. I was going to explain about my fingers,” and Mrs. Oakenshaw went off into an elaborate description of her complaints, to which the others were obliged to listen before they

could hope to obtain any of the intelligence for which they wished. But at length they managed to collect that Mrs. Oakenshaw had one day unexpectedly met Mrs. Burton at the physician's house, had heard from her where she was then living, and had promised to call upon her. "Poor thing! she seemed glad enough to see an old friend, and it was evident her proud spirit was broken: she looked happier, though, than you would suppose, and said her nephew and her daughter were the greatest of comforts to her. Well, I went to see her one day when Susan was spending the day with some friends, and I felt rather lonely by myself, and very surprised I was to find her in a nice well-furnished house in St. John's Wood; rather a small one, but as comfortable as anybody could wish for. Yes, I will say that for him, Marmaduke Wentworth has been a young man in a thousand: I cannot tell you half she told me: at first they were very poor, she said, and had to struggle hard. He had a situation in a merchant's office, but only, I suppose, a small salary: however he shared everything with her and Alice, and they all lived together in small lodgings, and Alice worked embroidery, which was sold privately to increase their means. Not a penny would any of them touch that had been unlawfully gained, though that wretch Burton did write once to his wife and offer her a part of the sums he had carried off."

“But how did they manage to get on so as to be so well off now?” asked cousin Bessy.

“Young Wentworth was much liked by his employers; he worked hard, and grew into quite a clever man of business. One never can say what people have in them: I used to think him a poor dawdling kind of young man myself. They increased his salary by degrees, and now it is a very good one: besides this, he has written for magazines a good deal, and got a connection with one of the leading papers, and he has made some very useful friends. Patty Burton hinted that he had hopes of obtaining through some of them an employment more to his taste than the one he has at present, for though he works hard, she says, he does not really like it. Something under Government, I think she meant.”

“And did you see him?” inquired cousin Bessy, glancing towards Katharine, but Katharine’s face was invisible, turned towards the fire.

“No,” returned Mrs. Oakenshaw, “he was away in the city, and I left London so soon, I had not time to call again.”

“And Alice?”

“Alice is a nice, ladylike, quiet girl; not exactly pretty, but sweet-looking, and quite the joy of her mother’s life; indeed she was the sunshine of the house, her mother said, when she was out of hearing, and kept them cheerful and alive with her pleasant

talk and her music in the evenings. I should not wonder if she and her cousin make a match of it, with all their singing together and so on. There was a pretty little cottage piano in the room, and heaps of music I noticed."

"Did Mrs. Burton hint at such a thing?" asked cousin Bessy, with another look at the downcast head, which was drooping lower and lower, and seeming more resolutely to turn towards the fire.

"Why, no—not exactly; only she spoke of changes, and not expecting always to keep her child's affection to herself, and she sighed a little, poor thing! though of course the match would be a most suitable one. Yet, perhaps, she feels that Alice will never be so much her own again, and, as she said, she has few friends. She has withdrawn entirely from those she formerly knew, which accounts for our never having heard of her: it was her nephew's wish as much as her own, she said, to separate themselves altogether from their past life, and of course she had no inclination to seek new friends."

"And how does she look?"

"Oh, pretty well; she is ailing sometimes, and her nephew insists upon having the best advice for her, but, between ourselves, I don't think there is much the matter with her. You may remember in her youth she was always as strong and ruddy as a milkmaid; in fact, at her father's farm she worked like one. Now, of course, she feels that she cannot



do as she did in those days, but still she is very different from a poor creature like me, delicate from my childhood, and with my life despaired of many a time. *I* could never have lived through what she has; neither my frame nor my spirits would have stood it. Even now, she looks as if she could take me up in her arms and carry me. And speaking of appearance reminds me of Miss Marchmont; I really never saw a young woman so much improved in my life. I declare she looks ten years younger than she did when first I saw her: plumpness is particularly becoming to her, for she is on too large a scale to be slight: she used to be so wiry and stiff when she was thin. She would strike any one as handsome now."

"She looks better as a woman than she did as a girl," said Katharine, looking up for the first time, "and, unlike most of us, improves with age. She will come out quite a beauty I dare say, when the rest of us are withered old women."

Katharine spoke with a tinge of bitterness: she was only three-and-twenty, yet in her own eyes she looked faded and worn.

"Love and happiness are great beautifiers," said cousin Bessy; "but you are too young to talk in that way."

"And Philip," said Mrs. Oakenshaw, following the train of her own thoughts, "how changed he is too! and who would have thought of those two

going together : what are you about, Miss Katharine, to let them all get married before you ? ”

“ Oh, I am going to follow cousin Bessy’s example,” said Katharine, laughing.

“ Nonsense, child ! it is all very well to be an old maid, but you know I have always told you I did not recommend people to imitate me. And you will be married, never fear,” said cousin Bessy.

“ There is time enough before you, at any rate,” said Mrs. Oakenshaw. “ I am far from approving of those very early marriages : Miss Marchmont, in my opinion, has just reached the age when a sensible young woman may be willing to change her condition : my niece Susan is engaged, you know, and she is about the same age. But see, the gentlemen are coming in. How Miss Marchmont brightens up, and makes room for Philip near her ; and how devoted he is to her, and yet no nonsense about either of them ! She behaves just in the refined way one would expect from a well-born young woman as she is. Philip is really fortunate in making such a connection : as I told my friend Mrs. Thorpe just now, an alliance with an old family like that of the Marchmonts of Greymore is not to be lightly esteemed.”

It was now tea-time, and Katharine joined a younger circle near the table. She naturally wished to gain from Grace Oakenshaw some further information respecting Mr. Wentworth, but Grace knew

less than her aunt did, Susan not having had much interest in collecting news on the subject when she had been in London with Mrs. Oakenshaw. She had indeed seen Mrs. Burton at Dr. Brandon's, but not had any particular conversation.

Poor Katharine! after managing, with infinite pains, to lead Grace to speak on the desired topic, she found only disappointment, and could not even gain any decisive idea upon the point which at once interested and tormented her—the possibility of a future union between Marmaduke and his cousin.

Everything else she had heard had given her unmixed satisfaction; she was proud of him, but not surprised. That he should act nobly and energetically, was only to act according to his nature.

Later in the evening the customary visit was paid to the kitchen, where the farm-labourers were being entertained. Agatha felt that she was the grand object of attention, as all the servants and dependants knew by this time that she was the future bride of Mr. Philip, and naturally enough looked on her with more interest than when she had been simply Mr. Rivers' eldest daughter. After a time she managed to withdraw from the group, and to walk up the passage which led to the dial garden. She had reached the door before she remembered that it was the spot where she had talked with Philip four years ago. A desire for a few minutes of quiet

thought came over her, and she pushed open the unlatched door and walked out. It was a clear, cold, starlight night, but Agatha seldom minded cold, and her dress was warm and made up to the throat, so she continued to pace up and down under the elder-trees for some time.

She could not be absent long, though, without being missed by Philip, and by-and-by he came to seek her. Though he affected to scold her for being out of doors without cloak or shawl, he did not object to her staying out a few minutes longer when he was by her side.

“We have scarcely had a word together to-day,” he said, “and I must go to Greymore to-morrow.”

“But you are coming again soon?”

“Yes, of course I am ; but does it not strike you, Agatha, that I am wasting a great deal of time in travelling backwards and forwards? Would it not be better to be together, than one of us at Hazel Bank and the other at Greymore? How long is this to last?”

“It has not lasted so very long,” said Agatha.

“That is not like you, Agatha: you generally give direct answers,” said Philip. “Why do you always refuse to fix a time for this unsatisfactory life to end? We have waited long enough already; we are not children, but old enough to know our own minds. I cannot see any purpose in putting off our

happiness. Life is not so long that we can afford to waste it."

"I will tell you," said Agatha, "why I object to make a decision. So long as Katharine is unhappy, I cannot plan any happiness for myself."

"But Katharine is not unhappy."

"Not exactly, perhaps, but I know she thinks about Mr. Wentworth. If it had not been for me she would have been his wife by this time; now it is impossible to tell whether he still thinks of her; whether they will ever meet, and all be explained. I cannot marry you, Philip, till I have done something to put the two on their former footing towards each other."

"But how could you do it?" said Philip; "you have no more chance than Katharine has of meeting Mr. Wentworth, and even if you could enter into any explanations with him, you would seem to be assuming that Katharine cared for him, and was only waiting to receive his renewed proposals or whatever that letter contained. Now what you consider a woman's delicacy, would be outraged by such a proceeding."

"I have thought of that," said Agatha, "and I own I do not see clearly how to gain my end; but till it is gained, I am determined not to marry you. I heard to-day from Mrs. Oakenshaw various things about Mr. Wentworth, and I might easily get his address from her, but still I could not write to him

without knowing whether he still thinks of Katharine. If you can suggest anything, I am only too willing to hear: you ought to know, Philip, that I will not remain parted from you a moment longer than is necessary."

Philip was thoughtful for a few moments.

"I can see one way of managing the affair," he said, at length; "but you must withdraw your rash words, Agatha. Before we are married my plan will not be practicable. You know that Manners and I were latterly very friendly and intimate; since he has left Coverdale we have corresponded occasionally, though, through my fault I believe, we have not had any communication for a long time."

"Then why not write at once and ask him everything?" said Agatha, impatiently.

"I could not do it without making him suspect that I had particular reasons for inquiring about Mr. Wentworth, as I have never shown any interest in him before; besides, if I did find out all about him, it could do no good. I don't think you could explain things without seeing him: by writing you would compromise Katharine, and in any way it would be difficult to avoid betraying too much of your own mind to him."

"I hope I shall not shrink from that," said Agatha. "I shall be careful, of course, of Katharine's dignity, but I must not mind sacrificing my own."

“But I could not bear you to do that,” said Philip ; “to have you confessing to him that you once fancied—— No, Agatha, I could not endure that.”

Agatha’s face crimsoned, and she pressed her lips together.

“Philip, I must make what atonement I can, but the choice is still open to you; if you fear any degradation from——”

“Hush, Agatha, I was wrong,” said Philip ; “you will only act nobly and——”

“But the plan, Philip?”

“Well, shortly before our marriage, I will write to Manners and ask for his congratulations; then during our tour, for I suppose we shall do like other people and have one, we will contrive to be in his neighbourhood and see him. You know we have agreed that we wish to see our own country instead of going abroad, and you have often mentioned that you would like to visit Cornwall and the Land’s End. Manners lives in Devonshire; it will be easy to meet him, and in a casual way I will get all the information you require.”

“But, Philip, I really do not think you have the gift of getting out information in a casual manner, and you would make Mr. Manners suspicious directly.”

“You don’t know what I could do with a strong motive.”

“It seems so far-fetched,” said Agatha.

“Hear me to the end. Afterwards we will go to London; Manners will give me some commission to his friend; at any rate we will find out some way of meeting him, that is to say, if we have reason to suppose that he still thinks of Katharine, and then you shall tell him as much as is sufficient to make him again write or speak to her. I do not see that you need tell him *why* she did not get the letter, at least why you wished——”

“If only it could be managed before—if I could feel satisfied before our marriage,” said Agatha.

“It could not be done before,” interrupted Philip; “you must have an interview with Mr. Wentworth; writing would not do; it would make it too serious a business, and he would suspect too much. In conversation you could let him know that Katharine had not received the letter.”

“But I must be sincere,” said Agatha; “*you*, Philip, do not advise equivocation.”

“No; only writing makes it so much more important, and affects Katharine as much as yourself. You must see him, and until you are married and go up to London with me, I see no chance of your doing so. Besides, as a married woman, you can make any communication of the kind much better than you can now.”

“Perhaps,” said Agatha; “but I don’t wish to spare myself; and, after all, it is very unsatisfactory.”



“Not very complimentary to me,” said Philip, “but now let us talk of ourselves ; you cannot object to fixing the time now.”

Agatha no longer raised difficulties ; the house would be ready in spring or early summer, and their tour would occupy some time, so at length April was the month decided upon for their marriage.

When, after much lingering, they returned to the house, they found all the party assembled in the drawing-room ; but their absence had not caused many remarks. They had all the privileges of acknowledged lovers, and no one thought of teasing them. They were neither of them the sort of persons to encourage joking, and it was sometimes a subject of complaint amongst the younger ones, that there was no fun in watching them, they were so matter-of-fact. Even the lynx-eyed Mrs. James Thorpe did not find much to observe, and though she directed Charlotte Brooke’s attention to Agatha as she came in, and said something in an audible voice about “a cold evening” and “garden walks,” she did not succeed in raising the colour on Agatha’s delicate cheek.

When the Hazel Bank party drove away that night, Philip whispered, as he placed Agatha in the carriage :

“We shall meet on New Year’s day, I am coming back for Hester’s party ; and then we can talk about April : only three months, my Agatha !”

“Only three months,” she repeated; and they parted.

Agatha had been very happy that evening after her conversation with Philip in the garden, but when she was once more alone, her mind misgave her that she had consented too readily to ratify her happiness, before using some exertions to remove the obstacles to that of Katharine.

She recalled Philip's evident repugnance to her making any disclosure of her weakness to Mr. Wentworth, and she began to fear that if she really were his wife she might share his ideas, and become persuaded to give up her intention. She would then, by compromising her own dignity, be compromising his; and once more, she bitterly lamented the folly and the guilt that had brought her into such a position. But it was her clear duty to let Mr. Wentworth know that it was no fault of Katharine's that his letter had remained so long unanswered, and without taking the blame upon herself, it was impossible to make him aware of the fact, except by wrapping up the whole affair in a mystery which might be a source of future discussion and unpleasant surmises between Katharine and himself. Katharine she knew would never betray her, but she ought not to leave her anything to betray. And yet she could understand Philip's reluctance, that the woman of his choice should own to another man that she had committed so grave an error, and, worse still, should allow that other man to

imagine that she had ever felt an interest in him which he had not returned. Though she might harden herself against her own feelings in such a case, she could not withstand those of another. No; if she were Philip's wife, she would scarcely have a right to confess—a right to make him ashamed of her.

There was madness in the thought; for him to be ashamed of her! he, whose wife ought to be so superior, so elevated! And yet she *must* do justice to Katharine, at whatever risk to herself. Let Mr. Wentworth imagine what he would about her former partiality, her jealousy, and her motives, he yet must be told the whole truth about the way she had acted. It was plain, whilst she still had her freedom she must speak; afterwards, let Philip draw back if he willed it.

Agatha arrived at this decision after much thought and many tears, but it was irrevocable; her only difficulty now was the way to accomplish her design, for she saw, as Philip did, that there were objections to her writing to Mr. Wentworth, unless she were assured that he was still desirous of gaining Katharine's love.

Philip, meantime, was not in a happier frame of mind; the satisfaction he had experienced in having induced Agatha to name a fixed time for their union, did not long remain unmixed; he began to consider what she had said to him about her determination to

avow to Mr. Wentworth her treachery in concealing his letter, and he shrank naturally enough from her doing so.

It seemed unnecessary, Quixotic, and degrading, and he regretted having formed any plan to facilitate it. There seemed no reason to suppose that Katharine's happiness had suffered, and in all probability Mr. Wentworth had soon forgotten her. Why should Agatha interfere?—why should she confess so much, that Mr. Wentworth could not but conclude love for him had influenced her? And though he firmly believed that Agatha never had loved any one as she now loved him, yet to have another man suspect that she had ever felt the remotest shadow of liking for him was insufferable.

That Mr. Wentworth would have generosity enough to close his eyes to so obvious a conclusion, he could not believe; doubtless he would see readily enough what was so flattering to his self-conceit. Philip knew little of the man who had been his rival in Katharine's regard, and who had also preceded him in Agatha's affections, or, at least in her fancy, and perhaps it was scarcely consistent with man's nature that, under the circumstances, he should look upon him with unprejudiced eyes.

He had never envied him his superiority in attractive qualities, but he had never given him credit for much beyond surface advantages.

Apart from Agatha, Philip worked himself up

into a state of impatience at her extreme notions of repentance and atonement, and he resolved to oppose them with the whole force of his will; he closed his eyes resolutely to the secret belief of his higher nature, that she was only intending to act with simple truth and justice, and that positive duty required what he repeated to himself was morbid and exaggerated.

Thus both Philip and Agatha passed the few days of their separation in uncomfortable thoughts and unpleasant conclusions: though some letters were exchanged between them, during the interval, neither of them alluded to the subject which was chiefly occupying their minds; it was reserved for discussion until they met, and they both looked forward to New Year's day with more mingled emotions than generally attended a prospect of seeing each other.

## CHAPTER XI.

## A MEETING, A DISPUTE, AND A DISCLOSURE.

IT was the evening of New Year's day; Katharine and Hester were sitting together in the young wife's pretty dressing-room at Somerford Court.

A cheerful fire blazed in the grate; the cold twilight was shut out by the long folds of the crimson curtains; wax lights shone above the tasteful toilette apparatus, and were reflected in the tall cheval glass. Various articles of evening costume were scattered about—rich, glistening silk, and delicate lace, and brilliant flowers; and the light quivered and sparkled on the glittering, costly gems, which flashed forth from open jewel-cases.

A somewhat different scene from that which had formerly witnessed the confidences of the sisters!

And yet many things might remind one strangely of old times: there was no attendant in the room; and Hester, seated in an arm-chair in her simple dressing-gown, was submitting with a resigned air, and her usual expression of indifference to her charms, to Katharine's elaborate arrangement of her silky tresses.

Katharine had been staying at Somerford for two or three days, to assist its youthful mistress in the management of the Christmas festivities ; to-night Agatha and Henry, and the younger girls, had also arrived, to take part in the ball which was to celebrate the New Year. Mr. and Mrs. Rivers had paid a quiet visit some days previously, and Hester's younger brothers preferred staying with her when an amusement more congenial to their tastes than dancing was in question. Hester's maid had been despatched to preside at the toilette of her other sisters, and she had, as of old, given up herself to the care of Katharine.

"How strange it seems for Philip and Agatha to be engaged !" she said, after an interval of silence ; "and last year, at this time, who would have imagined that Agatha would have changed so greatly ! Still, Katharine, I cannot quite understand her."

"Nor I," said Katharine, "though we are really friends now, and on many points quite confidential."

"Does she talk to you of Philip ?" asked Hester.

"Sometimes ; but she will seldom speak of their marriage, and lately she has been particularly odd ; breaking off in the midst of allusions to the future, and going away to shut herself up as she used to do."

"I shall never understand her," said Hester ; "and I cannot imagine how you two became so suddenly intimate when we were away. Leonard was as much

surprised as I was, to find such a change when we came back."

"It was a fortunate thing," said Katharine, "otherwise I should have missed you even more than I do. Not that the confidence between Agatha and me is anything like what *ours* used to be; nothing can ever be like that."

"Why do you say 'used to be,' Katharine?" asked Hester. "Am I grown less confidential?"

"No; only you are married," said Katharine, with a half laugh, "and I know that all I say will be told to Leonard. Don't be vexed, Hester; I am not complaining: we are as unreserved as it is *possible* for us to be."

"We are not girls at home together," said Hester, thoughtfully. "Katharine, I sometimes wish you had some one you could tell everything to as I do to Leonard. But I must not speak on this subject; only if any one has a right to complain of want of confidence, I am the person, not you. You never will explain the cause of the mysterious satisfaction you assure me you feel about Mr. Wentworth."

"I cannot tell you more than I have done," said Katharine; "I wish I could, but it would be a piece of injustice to another person if I were to explain entirely."

"So you have told me before, but it is a continual puzzle to me. And I am not sure that I am glad you have this security that he did care for you.



I think I should like you to forget old times. I almost wonder you did not like Vincent Percival. You never told me about that, Katharine; and if he had not been frank with Leonard I should not have known positively that you had rejected him."

"It would scarcely have been fair to him to have told even you," said Katharine; "I should not have fancied he would wish Leonard to know it. However, you see he has soon forgotten me, as he is already engaged to another person."

"He has not forgotten you for all that," said Hester; "he told Leonard that you had opened his eyes to woman's good qualities, and made him believe in candour and unworldliness, and a host of things he had cynically begun to doubt; and it is entirely owing to you that he has become aware of the general perfections of womankind."

Katharine smiled.

"Rather curious reasoning; I don't know whether I ought to feel much flattered or the reverse. I think the old theory of a heart being caught on the rebound, accounts for his behaviour in the most natural manner. He has found a Juliet to my Rosalind, that is all. But, Hester, we really must not dawdle any longer; your head is almost perfect now, I think, so you must get up and put on your dress, or I shall not have time to finish my own toilette, and you know a *passée* person requires some care."

“What nonsense, Katharine! talking of being *passée*, you look just as well as ever you did. Yes, I see you have done my hair beautifully, but don’t I look too grand in these flowers?”

“Not at all; you are a married woman, you know, and if you say any more I shall make you wear feathers; but pray, be quick with your dress.”

Hester was soon ready, and looked undeniably lovely in her dress of aerial lace, and *coiffure* of pure white water-lilies, mingled with long sprays of the pale blue wistaria. The two or three choice jewels which completed her adornment did not destroy the simple elegance of appearance, though they gave her a slight increase of dignity, which became her new position. Katharine, after a hasty glance of approval, withdrew to attend to her own costume, leaving Hester to await her return.

“Or stay, Katharine,” exclaimed Hester, suddenly, “I may as well go with you and fasten your dress.”

“No, indeed; you, the mistress of the house, rushing about and destroying the first freshness of your gorgeous array! I will not hear of such a thing: I shall find plenty of people to help me; and you must stay quietly here till I come for you. Mind you don’t sit any nearer the fire, or your face will be flushed.”

“What a fuss you make about me, Katharine!” said Hester, laughing, as Katharine left the room.

It was not long before she again made her appearance, and the sisters then descended to the drawing-room, where they found Leonard all alone.

“Katharine has been dressing me,” said Hester to her husband; “I hope you think me very dazzling.”

Leonard made a reply which was so extremely lover-like that Katharine thought she might as well leave the young couple to themselves, and she walked across the room into the conservatory. They looked so radiant and handsome in their youth and love and happiness, that Katharine, notwithstanding her sympathising nature and her habitual control over her spirits, was for a moment dejected at the contrast they presented to herself. She felt very old and forlorn, and fancied she must appear so in the eyes of others. She caught sight of herself in one of the mirrors as she passed; how pale she looked compared with Hester! how inanimate and uninterested! Surely whatever little attractiveness she had ever possessed must have vanished long ago!

Katharine did not do herself justice: in fact, like most people whose beauty depends chiefly upon expression, she never saw her face at its best. Katharine gravely looking at herself in the glass whilst dressing her hair, or curiously examining the alterations time had made in her countenance, was very different from Katharine eager in conversation, or interested in listening.

Whatever her face had lost in brightness during

the last few years, it had gained in sweetness and depth: and now, on this evening, with her delicate complexion set off to advantage by her dress of pale, soft pink, her rich chesnut hair, gleaming in the lamp-light and adorned by clustering wild roses; her clear brown eyes, shining steadily forth, beneath her open white brow; and her light agile figure, graceful in its rapid movements, Katharine was, in her own peculiar way, quite as charming as she had ever been.

By the time she returned from the conservatory, some of the guests had arrived, and Agatha and Caroline had descended from their rooms. Fanny, though in the house, did not make her appearance. Her mother thought her too young, and she herself preferred remaining in the background, but from the recess on the staircase she could see distinctly the groups in the hall, and scrutinize the dresses without being herself observed. Caroline was soon in the midst of gentlemen, making engagements for the dances: she was becomingly dressed; looked moderately pretty, and decidedly at her ease: there was no fear that Caroline would not make her own way in society.

Agatha was sitting on a couch near Hester, watching for the entrance of Philip Thorpe with unusual impatience, though not betraying any of it in her manner.

She had never, in Katharine's opinion, looked so

handsome before ; there was a brilliant light in her eyes, and a faint crimson hue on her generally colourless cheek, great enhancements of her charms, but sure signs, to those who knew her well, of strong mental agitation. Her rich black lace dress and the scarlet pomegranate blossoms in her hair became her admirably.

Katharine *knew* that she was disturbed, but she could not guess the cause, and she had not time to speculate upon it, being soon obliged to enter into the amusements of the evening.

With all her troubles, she had still some lightness of heart ; and youth and the contagion of gaiety speedily asserted their sway ; in a short time she was dancing with more enjoyment than she would have believed possible a few minutes ago, and talking and laughing without any effort. Perhaps it is one of the rewards of persevering cheerfulness like hers, that the mind can at times cast away its sorrows, and give itself up to intervals of careless, innocent pleasure.

Hester did not go to the dancing-room at once, but remained receiving her guests. This was the first very large party she had had, and she was not quite free from nervousness : still her resolution to act as became Leonard's wife supported her, and few would have guessed that she was not entirely at her ease.

She had been talking to Agatha for a minute or two, when a lady and gentleman approached, and she

turned to receive them: they were strangers to her, for they were magnates who had not come in her way during her life at home; and since her marriage they had been very little in the country, and in the interchange of calls and civilities something had always occurred to prevent a meeting; she knew, however, that Leonard had a high opinion of Mr. Vavasour, who was a clever man and one of the county members, and she had often heard him say that he wished her to know Mrs. Vavasour. So she was ready to greet them as graciously as possible, but she was not prepared for the sight of another gentleman who followed them, and whose face on the first slight glance seemed familiar.

“As an additional dancing man is generally welcome in a ball-room, Mrs. Merivale, I have taken the liberty to bring a friend who arrived unexpectedly to-day,” said Mr. Vavasour, in a low voice to Hester, as he shook hands with her. “I believe, indeed, he is not a stranger to you: you and Mr. Wentworth have met before.”

Hester’s face lighted with surprise and pleasure, as with some confusion she welcomed the new comer. Her first impulse was to call out, “Katharine!” but she rapidly checked herself, and not seeing Katharine near, yet anxious to retain Mr. Wentworth until she had a chance of finding him, she said to him, looking a little towards Agatha,—

“Here is another of your old acquaintances, Mr.

Wentworth: you have not forgotten my sister, Miss Marchmont."

Mr. Wentworth started: at first he had not recognized Agatha; the fine, majestic-looking woman in black lace and crimson flowers was strangely unlike the pale, thin, angular Agatha of his remembrance, with her deep mourning and severely plain attire. He shook hands with her warmly, and her voice soon assured him that she was indeed the same.

As Hester's attention was now called off by some other arrivals, he drew a chair to Agatha's corner of the couch, and began a conversation.

Agatha was greatly agitated: she had never contemplated the possibility of a chance meeting with Mr. Wentworth—of a sudden opportunity of testing the sincerity of her determination to speak the truth to him. Now that her course of action was simplified, it yet assumed a difficulty greater than she had anticipated. But she did not waver, only she must wait for some more retired scene, before she could refer to so important a subject. In the meantime she was anxious to hear everything that had befallen Mr. Wentworth, hoping to gather from his remarks some clue to his feelings concerning Katharine.

He was, as he always had been with her, open as regarded himself and his proceedings. The account he gave of his worldly career was the same as that which Mrs. Oakenshaw had already repeated: he mentioned, amongst other things, his literary labours,

and the way in which they had connected him with Mr. Vavasour, the friend through whose influence he had a prospect of entering upon a sphere of action more suited to him than his present one. It was on some business intrusted to him by another political friend that he had so suddenly come down to ——shire, and found the Vavasours on the eve of starting for Hester's ball.

As Agatha listened to him, and traced through his unpretending statements the energetic spirit which had animated him, his stern renunciation of formerly cherished pursuits, and the purity which his higher nature had preserved untainted, whilst mingling in scenes which she had been accustomed to consider consecrated to Mammon, she no longer wondered that she had suffered him to captivate her fancy in days of old.

True, he was not Philip; but still there was nothing to be ashamed of, in having felt a preference for him.

Only the preference had been all on her side; a conviction always sufficient to call a blush to a woman's cheek.

And this she must confide to him; or, at any rate, confide so much of her thoughts and deeds, that he could scarcely avoid inferring it! It was, in truth, a hard trial, and she shrank in dismay from the idea of lowering herself in his estimation. Whilst she was still listening to him, her face burning more and



more with tumultuous emotions, and her eyes growing brighter and brighter with excitement, Philip drew near the couch. He had already been seeking her in the other rooms, and now—to find her thus!

Truly, it was a night of surprises, and Philip could scarcely believe his eyes. For a moment, a groundless, unreasonable pang of jealousy stung him: he remembered that this man had once caught Agatha's fancy; that, for his sake, she had committed a serious fault. He was almost angry with her for looking so handsome and brilliant, and attributed her improved appearance to her delight at meeting his old rival.

And then the man himself, how superior he was to half the people in the room! how superior to him, Philip Thorpe, with his slow, cold speech, his deficiency in drawing-room advantages, and light, ready repartee! Philip knew that his face and figure were good, but he was unaware of the improvement in his bearing, which time, and the consciousness of being an independent, usefully employed man, had brought. He did not know that there was dignity in his grave look, and distinction in his firm tread and decided manner; and he exaggerated perfections which differed from his own.

With a gloomy brow he went behind the couch, and, leaning over it, said to Agatha, in a low but peremptory voice—

“You must make time to speak to me; leave him, or send him away, and come with me into the hall.”

Agatha was rather startled, and she suddenly brought her conversation with Mr. Wentworth to an end. As Philip came round to the front of the couch, she rose and took his arm.

The two gentlemen bowed somewhat coldly to each other, without expressing any common-place words of surprise at their unexpected meeting, and Mr. Wentworth was led to ponder upon another of the changes that had taken place since he had left the neighbourhood.

Agatha and Philip together! and evidently with a mutual understanding; would the alterations extend through the whole circle?

He looked at Hester, observing her more leisurely than he had done before; the pretty, shy, quiet girl had developed into a beautiful young woman; timid and retiring still, it is true, but yet not without a graceful self-possession, and a consciousness of what was fitting in her new position.

But where amidst all these wonderful transformations was Katharine? As if in answer to his mental question, Hester just now spoke.

“You are staying here idle, Mr. Wentworth. Will you not go into the ball-room? You will find my sisters; at least, Katharine and Caroline are there, I believe, for I cannot see them here.”

Mr. Wentworth obeyed; a waltz was in progress

when he reached the ball-room, and he soon gained a favourable place for watching the circle of dancers. He soon recognized Katharine amongst them; she was less altered than the others; the slight delicate figure, the bright expressive face, he knew so well were there; even the way of dancing was unchanged; the same light floating movement, the visible half-unconscious enjoyment!

After some little time, Katharine and her partner rested for a minute near the spot where Marmaduke was standing, and she caught a glimpse of his face.

It was unmistakeable; the hero of her dreams, the loved and trusted object of her dearest thoughts, was once more before her; she really saw him once more, yet she could scarcely dare to believe that her senses were faithful to her. Anything so far beyond her hopes almost stunned her; she could not speak, and her hand trembled on her partner's arm. He thought she was tired, and proposed sitting down.

"Oh, no," said Katharine, trying to collect herself.

"Shall we go on then?" was the reply; "it is a pity to lose such music;" Katharine assented, and was whirled away again.

When the dance was over, she looked round for Mr. Wentworth. She had not been dreaming, for there he was close to her elbow.

"You are surprised to see me," he said, after the first astonished hurried greeting had passed. "I am no less surprised at finding myself here."

“Yes; how is it?” said Katharine; “I don’t understand.”

She was bewildered, and many ideas were struggling in her mind, and her tone was wretchedly cold and unlike herself. His manner was no less constrained than hers; how could it be otherwise? He believed that she had treated him with neglect, and she knew what his thoughts must be, and could not do anything to undeceive him.

Several people were near them: a young man was approaching to claim Katharine as his partner for the next dance; in an instant they might be separated, and lose sight of each other for the rest of the evening.

Mr. Wentworth, though half blaming himself for weakness towards one who had shown herself so regardless of him, could not let Katharine escape him without an effort, and he asked her to dance.

In virtue of her place as sister to the lady of the house, and also of her own claims as a good dancer, she was engaged several deep, but a quadrille at no great distance was still free, and she promised to dance it with Mr. Wentworth. She gave him her card, that he might write his name upon it, and this little action, ordinary and unmeaning as it was to her, had to him something chilling and formal about it; it was not thus that in former days their engagements had been made, and he accused her in his heart, of wishing to convert him into a mere

acquaintance ; quite forgetting that they had never before met at a regular ball, and that the like ceremony had never been necessary.

He took the card, cast a rather curious glance down the list of names, and wrote his initials opposite the quadrille.

Katharine, in her desire to fulfil her duties as Hester's sister, made matters worse by saying—

“ You have no card yourself ; I will tell Henry to give you one, they are in his charge.”

“ Thank you, do not trouble yourself ; I am not likely to form any engagements I shall forget.”

Though the tone was freezing, there was something in it which did not altogether displease Katharine ; but she had no time to meditate upon it, as her partner was eager to commence dancing. She did not know what became of Mr. Wentworth during the interval which passed before the quadrille was danced ; she began to imagine that he had vanished, but at the appointed time he made his appearance, and led her away to the dance. Katharine had never felt so uncomfortable in his presence as she did now ; her first emotion on seeing him had been boundless joy, but that had soon died away, and an inexplicable kind of dread had taken its place.

All the enthusiastic confidence she had entertained of his unchanging affection had departed, now she stood face to face with him ; she remembered only that he must for four years have been condemning

her as a heartless and contemptuous coquette, and that during that long period his love must have entirely cooled or dwindled away.

His few words about the card had slightly reassured her, but now, when she was dancing with him and listening to his conventional speeches, she felt as if they were once more strangers to each other. And how to explain, when perhaps he no longer cared for explanation? How, even if he did care, could she enter upon a history which would lower Agatha's dignity, and betray her faults? No; she could not be so ungenerous, and as she looked at his calm face, and heard his quiet, polished words, she said to herself with a pang that her hesitation was needless; he was too indifferent now for anything to reawaken his regard. This conviction influenced her manner: if he treated her as a stranger, she returned the treatment with interest. They might have been taken for a fashionable young man and woman meeting for the first time, or only accustomed to meet in ball-rooms, and discussing with fluent ease a hundred nothings, on which neither of them wasted a thought.

Mr. Wentworth was struck painfully with Katharine's air; had she been silent and constrained, he could have borne it better; but this superficial style of intercourse was so unlike what had taken place between them before; and he recalled with wonder and a sense of regret, the transparency of her manner

the last evening they had spent together, when he had found it so hard to resist saying the words which she was evidently so ready to hear. Four years had brought increased dignity and prudence to Katharine in externals, unchanged as she might be in mind and heart.

And so this unsatisfactory dance came to an end; each remaining dissatisfied with the other. Katharine could have wept with vexation: the meeting so longed for, the interview which had seemed to promise too much happiness ever to be granted, to pass away in this miserable, unnatural way. It was almost incredible that they should be so near together and at the same time so far apart!

Meanwhile, Agatha and Philip had been engaged in a somewhat angry discussion, interrupted at intervals when their attention was demanded by other people, but always recurring when they were together and undisturbed.

They were not, as it is known, great dancers, but they did not object to join in a quadrille, and they had been dancing the last not far from the place where Katharine and Mr. Wentworth had been standing. At its conclusion they walked into the hall, and, reaching a recess at one end which was furnished with sofas and chairs, they sat down to converse in quiet.

“How can you be so perverse, Agatha?” said Philip, in answer to one of her remarks; “they are

certain to come to an understanding now they have met. I thought this would have cleared away all difficulties."

"They will never understand each other without my help," said Agatha. "I am quite convinced Katharine will never tell him of my conduct. Besides, she cannot begin the subject. Very likely she fancies he is indifferent."

"And perhaps he is so, Agatha, and your interference would not do any good. Do leave them alone: if there is true love between them, they will find it out.—How did you and I manage to understand each other, in spite of your obstinacy and pride? Feeling will have its way, you may be sure."

"I betrayed myself in a moment of great agitation, such as is not likely to arise for Katharine," said Agatha, with a slight trembling in her voice; "but be that as it may, it is my duty to declare the truth, and I will do it at any cost."

"And have you no duty to me to consider?" said Philip, quickly. "I have a right over you, Agatha, and I will not suffer you to trifle with your dignity and mine."

"I can guard my own dignity," said Agatha; a calm, unnatural tone succeeding to her trembling one, as was always the case with her after the first moments of unusual excitement. "As yet you have no right over me, and if you disapprove of any-



thing I say or do, there is still time to separate."

"Agatha, you don't care for me; you don't consider me in the least."

"I must also consider myself and others," she replied, in the same voice.

Philip generally understood her well enough to see through the external calmness which veiled her most violent emotions; but just now he was excited, goaded beyond endurance.

"Yes; it is plain who you are considering, Agatha; you want to break with me; to avow shamelessly to another man what you once did for his sake: he will then be at liberty to choose between you and Katharine. Dupe that I have been, to believe that you were only guided by conscientious scruples! you still love this man. Go, and say what you will; there he is, standing alone in the verandah."

Agatha stood for an instant as one petrified—she pressed her hands convulsively upon her heart, and said, in a low, choking voice—

"This also I have deserved;" then, speaking louder, she added—"I am glad you have spoken so plainly, Philip; what you suspect, shows what you are; nothing that I can do will ever disgrace you. You are as free from me as if we had never met; but I am wasting my words foolishly. *You* have renounced *me*, and I accept the renunciation. And I will do as you advise: you shall see me join

Mr. Wentworth, and then you may place what unworthy construction you will upon my behaviour."

She walked away with a firm step, and crossed the hall to the door which led outside. On the way, she tried to arrange her thoughts a little—not those relating to Philip and herself, she was too much shocked and stunned for that—but concerning what she should say to Mr. Wentworth.

He was, as Philip had said, in the verandah, and no one was near; so, crushing back her outraged feelings, and her shrinking delicacy as best she might, she went up to him, and said, so abruptly that he started—

"I must speak with you, Mr. Wentworth; let us walk up and down here."

He murmured some courteous reply and offered his arm, but Agatha would not take it.

"Mr. Wentworth, you wrote to my sister Katharine four years ago."

"Yes, four years ago!" he repeated in surprise, hardly knowing what he was saying.

"It has never been answered," pursued Agatha, in her deliberate, unrelenting manner, as if she were trampling over her own feelings at every word she uttered; "but that is no fault of Katharine's; she never received the letter till four months ago."

"But how? Was it mis-sent? How was it that after so long a time it reached her at all? There

is a mystery here: some one has been tampering with my letter."

"I did; I kept it from Katharine all the time."

"But, Miss Marchmont," interrupted Mr. Wentworth, hastily, "what right had you to interfere? If I acted imprudently and rashly, Katharine's parents, and not you, were the proper judges between us."

"I did not know what was in the letter," continued Agatha; "though I guessed. I kept it from Katharine by a series of errors. I thought she presumed upon your attachment to her, and triumphed over others; I heard gossiping words implying that I—I wished for the preference she had gained, and I thought that she despised my claims to notice or regard. My pride, my—— I was irritated, and that same day, at the post-office, your letter fell into my hands. I was angry at what seemed to confirm her triumph, and I wished the letter might be lost. I did not destroy it, but chance, as I thought, destroyed it for me. It fell, I fancied into the water, and though I really tried to find it, I could not succeed. I returned home, and made up my mind to say nothing about it to Katharine. This is the weakest part of my conduct; I feared she would attach importance to the silly words that had been spoken; and imagine, if I told her that I had lost a letter in your handwriting, that I had done it purposely. I told a deliberate lie, and said there

had been no letters except some which I delivered to the others. That same evening *your* letter was brought to me: it had been found by a friend, who had seen my search, and who thought it belonged to me; the address was no longer distinct. I could not resolve to give it to Katharine, and acknowledge that I had told a falsehood; I often tried, but always failed. I could not bear to sink in her opinion. At last, four months ago I did it."

Mr. Wentworth had listened in extreme bewilderment to this speech: Agatha's actions, or rather the motives for them, seemed wrapt in an impenetrable mist.

"I am so perplexed," he said, at last, "I can hardly understand. Katharine did in the end receive the letter?"

"Yes; she has it now. I do not wonder at your perplexity; but must I explain further? Can you be generous enough to let the past rest, now you know the facts? I have suffered deeply for my treachery, and the feelings which prompted it have long ago passed away."

Agatha's voice was trembling now; she could not touch on this theme without quivering in every fibre of her frame, though she had spoken bravely hitherto.

A glimmering, uncertain and confused, glanced through Mr. Wentworth's mind, but he could be generous; he asked no more. Indeed he was now

chiefly anxious about Katharine, and he could afford to leave Agatha's reasons in oblivion.

"Thank you," he said, at length, "you have done me a great service now : but will you add to it by telling me if your sister was displeased at receiving my letter? It is so long since I have heard anything that I do not even know if she is still disengaged."

"Katharine is disengaged," said Agatha ; "I have no right to say anything more. And, pray, leave me now ; I have done my part at last."

He hesitated a moment, scarcely liking to obey her, yet feeling that it would be kinder and more truly gentlemanly to leave her to herself; even thanks for her strange confession seemed better omitted, so, with a hasty "We shall meet again before the evening is over," he walked away.

Agatha waited till he was out of sight ; then she sprang down the steps, ran across the lawn, and reached a seat in the shrubbery on which she flung herself in the abandonment of grief. The wintry night air fell on her unprotected neck and arms, but she heeded nothing so that she was undisturbed and alone.

## CHAPTER XII.

## KATHARINE'S JOY.—RECONCILIATION.

“HAVE you still a place on your card not filled up?” asked Mr. Wentworth, when he had succeeded in finding Katharine.

She was standing in one of the doorways of the ball-room after a galop, and she looked round in astonishment at his voice: it sounded again so like the voice of old.

“My card! Oh, where is it? I believe I have lost it.”

“So much the better,” said Mr. Wentworth, smiling; “you cannot be expected to remember your engagements, so waltz with me this time.”

“I believe I am engaged to some one, but I cannot quite remember; I shall be very rude, I am afraid,” said Katharine, but she could not resist the old smile, and she took Mr. Wentworth's arm.

It was strange to be dancing together again; particularly strange to compare the present dance with the last wretched quadrille, and yet Katharine could not account for her satisfaction; and Marmaduke repeated over and over again to himself that he still

had no reason to conclude that she had been faithful to his memory for so long a time. But, at any rate, he could soon ascertain the truth. The dance concluded, they walked through the rooms towards the conservatory; no one was there, and Mr. Wentworth led Katharine forward to a bench at the farther end of it.

They sat down, and now Katharine felt that the decisive moment of her fate had arrived; she saw that unmistakeable something in Marmaduke Wentworth's face which told her he was about to speak the important words, and inconsistently she half wished herself away. He paused for a few moments, but he was looking at her intently, and Katharine turned red and pale, and felt that she was very foolish, and was almost inclined to burst into tears.

He spoke at last.

"I have just heard something of great importance to me, which makes me say what I had resolved never to say again. Katharine, four years ago I told you I loved you; if you had received my letter then, what would you have said?"

"Can you ask?" said Katharine, in a low voice.

"And can you forget the time that passed before it reached you, and give the answer now?" proceeded Marmaduke, with increasing fervency in his tone—"can you believe that my love is unchanged, that only my impression that you scorned it kept me silent so long?"

“How could you imagine that I scorned it?” said Katharine; “you did not trust me as I have trusted you.”

“Then you have trusted? you will answer me now, Katharine: you will let me call you *my* Katharine?”

“Yes,” said Katharine, raising her eyes for one instant as she spoke the little word.

“This is more than I deserve: I ought not to have concluded so hastily that you despised my love. Katharine, my life shall make up for it. You really and truly love me?”

“I will not tell you any more,” said Katharine, trying to carry off her agitation with a light air. “It is your duty to explain to me why you believed so easily that it was my fault your letter was not answered.”

“You have a right to ask, and I am ashamed of myself. But, in the first place, I feared I had acted imprudently, and, in the second, I was proud, and soon thrown back upon myself. You know a cloud rested upon my name, at least, upon the name of one nearly connected with me; you might have thought, with many people, that I was involved in his——”

“How could you so misjudge me?” interrupted Katharine.

“You must make allowances,” he returned; “I had many things to try me. When time passed and



no answer came, I accused you of heartlessness and trifling. I had so firmly believed that you had some small regard for me; I had fancied that if I had spoken before we parted, you would have answered favourably. I did not weigh the chances against your having received my letter; letters are so seldom lost, how could I expect that mine should be one of the exceptions to the general rule? I concluded that you had given me up. I was confirmed in this opinion by some gossip about you and a Mr. Percival, which reached my ears through my friend Manners. *He* believed you had forgotten me."

"I did not think I had acted indifference so well," said Katharine. "I used to be afraid that Mr. Manners would find out how anxious I was to hear about you."

"Then you *were* anxious? Oh, Katharine! if you knew how delightful it is to hear you say so. And all that weary time when you did not know that I had written, you could still trust in my love?"

"I believed that you were too true and honourable to have said what you did, unless you really cared something for me," said Katharine. "I sometimes feared that I was bold and unwomanly in believing so much without any real foundation, but still I hoped and thought that only circumstances prevented——" she hesitated.

"Heaven bless you for such love and trust, my

Katharine, and may I deserve them," said Marmaduke, solemnly. "I have failed in trust myself—but never in love. Even when blaming, I loved you."

"I could not have loved unless I had trusted," said Katharine.

"Your trust shall never be tried again," he answered; "and how I can love, the future shall show you."

He threw his arm round her and kissed her; it was a long, grave, tender caress, as if to ratify a vow.

A noise amongst the shrubs startled the two from their forgetfulness of the whole world but themselves. Katharine shrank suddenly to the end of the bench—as Mrs. James Thorpe's dry, sharp voice reached her ear.

"Gracious me! I thought the conservatory was empty: so it is you, Katharine, and you, Mr. Wentworth. I have scarcely had a word with you yet; I am curious to know the reason for your appearance again in this part of the world: at least, the reason you give out, for one may guess——"

Mr. Wentworth interrupted Sophia, and replied with his former dexterity to her cross-questioning, and Katharine, seeing an opportunity to escape, almost ran away.

But she and Mr. Wentworth were not separated for very long; he soon contrived to find her again,

and, owing to the fortunate loss of her card, danced with her more times than would otherwise have been practicable. Not without remonstrance from the forgotten partners, but it became so speedily evident that he was something more than an ordinary partner, that, by degrees, she was tacitly given up to him by common consent; and a little romance found its way through the circle, that Miss Rivers and a former lover had met, and important results might be expected. Those who knew Katharine well soon read the truth; which indeed neither she nor Marmaduke took any pains to conceal. They had much to talk of, and many things to explain; notes to be compared about their experiences in that dreary time of separation and uncertainty; past incidents to recall, and old days to live over again; no wonder that the night was only too short, and passed like a dream.

Katharine, without any explanation from Marmaduke, understood that Agatha had told him the history of the letter, and she felt deeply grateful, and fully appreciated the pain such an avowal must have caused her.

For a long time she watched in vain for a sight of Agatha, and at length saw her at supper, sitting at the opposite side of the table. She had lost her flushed, brilliant look, and was now pale, with sternly compressed lips, more like the Agatha of four years ago than the Agatha of the present time. Philip

was not near her, which puzzled Katharine, but she concluded, knowing that they were not expert at manœuvres, that by some bad management they had become separated, but she had no idea that Philip had any share in causing the alteration in Agatha's appearance. She accounted for it on the supposition that she had suffered many agitating and mortifying sensations in making her late narration to Mr. Wentworth, and she became still more grateful to her, and still more desirous to assure her of her gratitude, though doubtful whether it would be well to express it.

When at last the party was over, and even the most indefatigable dancers had departed, the household group lingered for a minute or two round the drawing-room fire.

There were no visitors staying in the house except Hester's sisters and brother, and Grace Oakenshaw, so the talk was free and unrestrained.

"It has been a charming party, Hester," said Caroline; "I never enjoyed one so much, and every one said it went off beautifully."

"I am so glad," said Hester; "I was rather afraid of not doing all that was expected of me."

"You behaved very well," said Henry, in a patronizing way. "I am sure I did not expect my shy sister, the quiet Miss Hester that was, to come out such an excellent hostess."

"There could be no doubt that Hester would do well what she undertook to do," said Leonard, who

did not quite approve that his wife should be patronized by her brother. He laughed at himself, however, almost immediately, saying, "It is a bad plan though to praise one's wife to her face."

Henry laughed. "And only think of that Mr. Wentworth turning up again to-night of all times! I suppose he told you all his secrets, Katharine. Really, Hester, you should not allow such desperate flirting in your house. Forbes told me, Katharine, that you threw him over decidedly about that last galop, and I saw your name on his card as plain as possible; however, he was considerate, and said, it would have been cruel to——"

"What became of Philip?" asked Hester, coming to the rescue.

"Agatha, you must answer for him," said Caroline; "he was never visible after the beginning of the evening."

Agatha had been standing perfectly pale and motionless since the departure of the guests, scarcely seeming to hear anything that had been said. She now started, and saying, "I cannot talk, I am too tired; good-night all of you," she walked out of the room.

"Hem!" said Henry; "a coolness between their High Mightinesses, I imagine; what can be the matter?"

"Philip left before supper," said Grace Oakeshaw, "for he asked me, as he was going, if the

Grange pony-carriage was to be sent for me in the morning."

"I wonder what the quarrel is about?" said Caroline.

"Don't wonder anything," said Hester, "but go to bed: and Grace, you need not talk about going back to the Grange to-morrow. I am sure your aunt can spare you another day."

Good-nights were exchanged, and the little circle dispersed.

"Hester!" whispered a happy voice, just as Hester had thrown herself into the large arm-chair before the fire of her dressing-room.

"Dear Katharine! I was just wishing for you."

"Hester!" again repeated Katharine, advancing into the room. It seemed impossible to get beyond that one word.

"I know it all; you need not tell me," said Hester, throwing her arm round her sister, and drawing her down beside her on the chair, where was ample room for both. And Katharine's happy tears fell like summer rain on Hester's neck, and the younger sister fondled and caressed the elder one, as a mother might do a child. For the present, she seemed the elder; the experienced matron listening to the young girl's confession.

"He is to speak to papa in the morning," said Katharine, "and, Hester, if you do not mind much, I should like to go home with the others to-

morrow afternoon ; I cannot rest till I have seen mamma."

"And *him*," added Hester, smiling.

"No, indeed," said Katharine, looking up saucily ; "he might find me out, if I were staying here, but I do want to hear what mamma will say."

"But you were to have helped me to entertain those people who are coming to stay, and there is that dinner party on Friday too."

"I will come back for that," said Katharine, "and if you really want to have a sister in the house, Caroline will be most ready to stay."

"Well, I suppose you must go, and I shall have to learn to do without you ; but mind you come back before Friday, darling ; we have so much to talk about."

A warm, sisterly kiss, and they parted.

Katharine lingered at Agatha's door as she passed ; there was no sound within. She was sure that Agatha was unhappy, and all through her generosity to her, and she could not sleep without speaking to her.

"Agatha, may I come in?" she said, quietly.

There was a sudden step across the floor, and Agatha opened the door, showing a pale, wan face ; her long dark hair streaming over her shoulders.

"Speak here, Katharine, if you have anything to say," she began, "but please do not disturb me to-night, I am only fit company for myself. To-morrow we will talk."

“I only want to say ‘thank you.’ You understand why; you have made me very happy; I only fear that you yourself are——”

“I shall be better to-morrow. Don’t think of me. I am very glad for your sake, Katharine,” and Agatha, after imprinting a long, fervent kiss on Katharine’s brow, resolutely closed the door.

“Incomprehensible still!” said Katharine to herself, as she entered her own room, but she was too happy to puzzle long about anything. As she took off her ball-dress and remembered the different feelings with which she had put it on, she could scarcely believe that one evening had produced so great an alteration in her circumstances and her prospects. Not without sincere thanksgiving to the Heaven which had thus crowned her “hope deferred” with joy did Katharine lay her head on her pillow; and then almost weary with happiness, she closed her eyes, and sank into a sweet, dreamless sleep.

The wintry twilight was closing in when Katharine, with Agatha and Fanny, reached home next day. Not many minutes had passed, when she was seated in her mother’s bedroom, receiving that fond sympathy which she had known would not be wanting.

Mr. Wentworth had been at Hazel Bank in the morning, had explained his circumstances to Mr. Rivers, and gained his consent to the engagement.

“We always liked him, you know, Katharine,” said Mrs. Rivers, “and though it is so long since



we have seen him, papa is quite satisfied with his account of himself, which we had heard indeed before from Mrs. Oakenshaw. Many people, I know, will think you might have done better, and blame us for overlooking his connection with Mr. Burton, but really all that is rather to his credit than otherwise. But I need not find excuses to you, dear child, for giving our consent too readily. I shall miss you very much, Katharine, but I believe he will make you happy, and you have both been very constant, which always promises well, to my mind."

Katharine listened in silence to her mother's remarks: it was so difficult to speak on the subject, yet she wished to prolong the conversation.

"Did he say anything about his aunt and cousin?" she asked.

"Of course he did. Papa would hardly have given his consent, if they had been still dependent upon him."

"But are they not?" asked Katharine.

"They will not be for long. Why, child, I do believe you know nothing of his wordly affairs. I suppose you talked of nothing so commonplace."

Katharine blushed. "I shall be glad to hear now, mamma."

"Well, his cousin is going to be married shortly, and her future husband is very well off and very generous, and will not hear of her mother depending upon any one but himself. I suppose you know

about Mr. Vavasour's friendship for your Marmaduke, and how he is interesting himself to get him a Government appointment. In fact, he is sure of it, and expects to enter upon it in spring. Papa was much pleased with his unpretending way of speaking about himself, and all the energy and resolution he has shown. He will not be rich, but his income, even now, would be quite sufficient to justify him in marrying, though he told papa that if he had not had a prospect of being something else than what he now is, he would scarcely have asked for your hand. *There* he was wrong, I think; he was wrong if he had reason to think you cared for him, but your father takes the *man's* view, and of course says he was right."

"He was too proud to say anything long ago," said Katharine, "when I was feeling very unhappy; I am sure you guessed it, mamma."

"I did, but it would have been worse than folly in me to make any remark to you, poor child. And so, all this time, you did not know that he cared for you?"

"I hoped it, mamma," said Katharine, "but it was not his fault that I was left in the dark. He wrote to me four years ago, not an offer, or anything like that, but a sort of explanation, and the letter never reached me; at least, only lately."

"How? Was it lost?"

"No, I have it now. But there was a—I don't

know—a sort of mistake, I would rather not tell you, mamma, but he was not to blame.”

“Well, it does not signify now: oh! Kate, we shall not like to lose you.”

“There will be no question of losing yet, mamma.”

“Not just yet, but in summer, I dare say, when he is quite settled, he will become impatient, and we must not be selfish. And, after all, I never expected anything else: one's children grow up, and leave one, and I must say, Kitty, I should not fancy being mother to a set of old maids.”

Katharine laughed.

“There is one thing,” added Mrs. Rivers, more gravely, “you must not imagine that you'll have money to squander. You will be sufficiently well off, but you must not attempt to vie with many that you will meet; for you will move in good society, and perhaps associate with those who are above you in worldly means. You must not expect either, that you can have everything about you like Hester, or even, perhaps, like Agatha and Philip.”

“Oh, mamma, I never dreamt of it.”

“No, I dare say you never thought of it, but it is as well to know exactly what to expect. Your aunt Sophia will be sure to say, that poor Katharine has not made so good a match as her younger sister.”

“I know, mamma,” returned Katharine, laughing,

“but Sophia always said, I had not a good feature in my face, and she never thinks one can be married for anything else, so she could not anticipate a better lot for me.”

Mrs. Rivers smiled.

“Now, child, go away, and take off your bonnet. I think I see cousin Bessy at the gate, she was to come to tea to hear an account of the ball. And Katharine, stay a moment; everybody in Fairfield will hear of your engagement to-morrow, I dare say: it would please Bessy, if you told her yourself. If it were to be kept secret, I would not trust her, but——”

“I will tell her, mamma,” said Katharine, moving away.

“You have not asked when you are to see Mr. Wentworth again,” said Mrs. Rivers, “but of course you wish to know. He had intended returning to town to-morrow morning, but he has put off his journey till night, and as he is to dine here, and go away by the mail train afterwards, I felt certain you would come home. Now run away, there is Bessy’s knock.”

Katharine ran downstairs, opened the door for cousin Bessy, and led her into the deserted school-room to take off her bonnet.

“Why, Katharine, I did not expect to see you to-day,” was Miss Thorpe’s greeting.

“I came home, and left Caroline at Somerford

instead of me," said Katharine; "I wanted to see mamma."

"And how did Hester look? beautiful, I suppose."

"Yes, she was much admired, and the ball was very pleasant," said Katharine, assiduously folding up a shawl. "Cousin Bessy, Mr. Wentworth was there."

"I know," returned cousin Bessy, to Katharine's surprise. "Mrs. James told me just now, but I wanted to make you tell me first. Was it not sly of me? Now tell me all."

"I have a great mind not to tell you anything, for going to hear Sophia's version of the ball before coming to us," said Katharine.

"You know I did not expect to see you, Katharine, but only Caroline," said cousin Bessy, penitently. "Come, you must tell me, for I know there is something, from Sophia's story."

"What story? what did she say?"

"Oh, something about the conservatory, and a scene there. Quite improper, according to her account, unless you were engaged."

Katharine turned very red.

"We *are* engaged, and papa has consented."

"There, I was sure of it; I am so glad," said cousin Bessy, in a tone of triumph. "Mrs. James stood out to me that Mr. Wentworth was a great flirt, and that you ought to have nothing to say to

him. She hoped Lucy would never behave so imprudently, but Lucy will never have the chance, I can tell her. I have no patience—but, my dear, you must tell me some more particulars.”

“There is not time now,” said Katharine, “tea will be ready; but you shall hear all, never fear. Will you go into the drawing-room to mamma now, cousin Bessy, for I must go upstairs and take off my bonnet.”

When Katharine entered her own room, she found herself waylaid by Fanny, and seized in a violent embrace.

“Darling Kitty! how glad I am! mamma has told me.”

“Mamma has had wonderful confidence in your discretion,” said Katharine, extricating herself from Fanny’s clasp, but kissing her nevertheless.

“Oh, it is no secret,” said Fanny; “I should have found it out directly. What fun to have so many weddings! First, Agatha’s, and then, in summer, perhaps yours. I have been thinking about the bridesmaids.”

“My dear Fanny, how you run on.”

“Indeed, Kitty darling, mamma ran on too, for she said you would live near London most likely, and I should see you at school. Oh, how nice it will be to come to you for the——”

“Hush, hush! Fanny, we cannot talk now. Come down to tea, they are all waiting.”

“I don’t believe Agatha is in the house,” said Fanny, as they went downstairs. “Do you know she actually went out again after we came home? I am sure I should have thought she had had enough of the cold air. Such a raw night it is!”

“I dare say she has come in by this time,” said Katharine.

“I believe she and Philip have had a quarrel,” said Fanny; “she looks so dismal.”

“Nonsense, Fanny! you are always thinking of love affairs.”

But Katharine, though she spoke lightly, could not help feeling a little uneasy about Agatha, who had, she feared, in order to give her happiness, endangered a portion of her own.

What Fanny had said was true. Soon after entering the house Agatha had again left it. She did not intend to proceed far, but she had a longing to be out of doors and alone.

She had not lost her habit of venting her agitation in violent exercise. The lane which ran along the side of the Hazel Bank garden was not much frequented, and here she walked up and down, little heeding the cold, foggy atmosphere and the dreary leaden prospect looming through the obscurity.

Agatha was very wretched still, though her feelings had undergone a change since last night. Then, indignation against Philip had mingled with other emotions; now, she could make allowances for his

irritated passion. Yet she was disappointed in him ; although during the past week she had pictured to herself his possible dislike to the course of action it was her duty to pursue. Although she had prepared herself to renounce him if he strove to alter her resolution, she never imagined that her renunciation would really be accepted ; she had believed that he would in the end see the matter as she did ; as he had, indeed, professed to do.

Never, above all, had she contemplated the possibility of his putting a wrong construction upon her proceedings : it was this which gave the sting to her thoughts and roused her dormant pride. To be so mistaken—so suspected ! Degrading idea ! He who for a moment could retain it was no longer worthy of her ! But reflection told Agatha that Philip had merely uttered his cruel words in a paroxysm of passion, and that he did not really believe in them.

Yet the tie between them was broken ; he evidently could not endure the thought of *his wife* having unveiled so much of her secret motives and her former feelings to another man. And she had brought all upon herself ; she was only experiencing to its utmost extent the misery she had prepared for herself. She had only completed the sacrifice required of her.

She would submit : life in future would be weary and sad. It was hard to give up the bright hopes



which had gladdened the last few months ; but what right had she to murmur ?

Agatha's spirit rose within her, prompting her to endurance, as it had prompted her to resistance ; she must bend humbly beneath her burden, and then she might hope to rise equal to her life-long task, " to suffer and be strong."

It was now late and dark, and she remembered that she ought to return to the house. She was about to open the garden-gate when a hand was laid upon her arm, and Philip Thorpe's dark figure appeared as if by magic, through the surrounding gloom.

" Agatha, I have lingered about for the last hour: will you speak to me ?"

Philip's voice sounded hollow, and there were marks of suffering visible on his countenance, even by the dim evening light.

" Oh, Philip !" was all Agatha's reply.

He drew her arm through his, and led her down the lane.

" Agatha, can you forgive me ? I spoke hastily last night, and my words might well offend you. How could I use such to my pure, my noble Agatha ! May I still say mine ?"

" Let us understand each other, Philip," said Agatha, resisting his effort to press her arm more closely to his side. " I can believe that you were irritated, and did not mean the words you said ;

but still the cause for your anger remains. You would feel yourself degraded by loving a woman who had confessed to another man that she had once done a wrong action, impelled by something that seemed like jealousy on his account. I have made the confession, and not uselessly. Katharine and Mr. Wentworth are engaged. I would not for the world have acted otherwise, but I can understand the light in which this appears to you, and you are entirely free. I cannot accept your renewal of affection unless you can, after consideration, make up your mind to consider what I have done no degradation either to you or me. If you do feel it so, nothing on earth should induce me to marry you, for I should know that sooner or later you would repent, as you did yesterday, though you had before seemed to agree with me."

"I know, I know," said Philip; "and I have felt in my heart all the time that you were right; but still I believe any man would have disliked as I did the—— What *did* you tell him after all, Agatha?"

"I told him the truth. I did not dwell upon my motives, certainly; but he might easily have guessed them. He could scarcely mistake them. I owned to feeling angry that he preferred Katharine. Nay, Philip, you must hear me; you *must* face the reality. If you can do so, and still believe yourself undegraded by your choice——"

“*If* I can! Oh, Agatha, I am honoured rather by it, if you can forgive me. Say that we stand to each other as we did before. Say it, Agatha. Let me hear once more that you love me.”

Philip poured out these words passionately and impetuously, and Agatha could not resist his overwhelming sincerity.

“You know I do. I will take you at your word, Philip; I think you are not deceiving yourself. May you never repent what you are now doing. And now, for your consolation, I may say that I don’t think Mr. Wentworth troubled himself to search much into my motives; his great anxiety was about Katharine, and to know whether she still thought of him.”

“And I can come in with you as usual,” said Philip, as they stood at the garden-gate once more; “we are still engaged, and no one knows that we have had any difference. And now there is no obstacle—it may be in April.”

Agatha did not dissent; on reaching the house, she went to take off her bonnet, whilst Philip joined the circle in the drawing-room. His entrance, and the way in which he replied to Mr. Rivers’ half-joking inquiry as to what had become of Agatha, assured Katharine that she had nothing to fear on the score of her happiness, and that if any quarrel had existed it was now over.

It was the last which ever took place between

Philip and Agatha, and nothing interfered to prevent their union at the time appointed. On a sunshiny day of April, Agatha Marchmont changed her name, and Katharine filled for the last time the post of bridesmaid.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## A NEW HOUSE AT GREYMORE.

A FEW last words—a parting glance at the bleak moors, the wild woods, and the ruined walls of Greymore.

It is an August evening; the setting sun sheds floods of light on the broad landscape in front of the new home of Philip and Agatha. The house is plain and unpretending, but it is built of stone, grave in hue, and massive in proportions, and does not look unpleasantly new or out of keeping with the scene.

The tall fir-trees cast long shadows on the mellow tints of the sun-lit heather and mountain grass; and the cultivated lands stretch peacefully forth under the sloping hills.

The old arch of the Priory stands out in its gray stillness amidst the dark woods; and beyond, a glimpse of the ruined mansion may be caught. Not enough to suggest its actual desolation, but sufficient to infuse a tone of gentle melancholy and sad remembrance into the view.

More cheerful, if less picturesque signs meet the eye in another direction; from the iron-veined hills

tokens of progress and discovery are visible, indications of a more vivid life than that old feudal one sinking to decay.

In the distance the mountain peaks catch roseate lights or melt in purple haze against the sky, whilst one bright, short track of reflected gold marks where the ocean bounds the horizon.

The new house at Greymore is not desolate and untenanted; on the front steps Philip is standing, looking eagerly down the road, which passes through what was once the park of the Priory. Within the porch, one of the hall-chairs has been brought forward, and there sits Agatha. Agatha, cheerful, contented, and handsome; not neglectful of her appearance, but dressed in a rich silk which catches changeful bright gleams from the departing sunlight. Agatha, with carefully braided hair shading the pure outline of her features, and softening whatever of severity may lurk there.

Her countenance is radiant and expectant, yet one can see that thoughtfulness is its common characteristic; the look of a woman who feels and reflects, and who has known what it is to suffer and to conquer.

But there is a tenderness in the deep, dark eyes that was not in them formerly, and as Philip comes forward, and his loving gaze meets hers, one knows that there exists between them perfect peace, and union, and trust.

“We are looking for them too early,” says Philip; “they can scarcely be beyond the turnpike by this time.”

“I am so impatient to see them; but, Philip, you have not told me about the house yet.”

Philip has just returned from London, and the house referred to is that of the expected arrivals, Marmaduke Wentworth and his bride, who have now been married about a month.

“I am not good at describing houses, as you know, Agatha, but it seemed a comfortable little place enough, with trees about it, and a garden; I dare say they will fancy it *country*, but you and I should feel ourselves imprisoned in it. There is nothing like this,” pointing the broad moorland.

“No, of course; but if it has anything rural about it, Katharine will make the most of it. She will know how to make her house look pretty.”

“Yes; and even now it looks very well. Mrs. Burton, who is in charge of it, showed me a number of knick-knacks; and the engravings we gave Katharine have a good effect on the walls. And Mrs. Burton praised the piano, which is made upon some new principle, incomprehensible to me, and to her also, I suspect; but Katharine and her husband will understand all about it. It is a present from one of his grand friends.”

“I can just fancy their life,” says Agatha, half shutting her eyes; “they will like it, but it would

not be free enough for us, Philip. Katharine will have a pretty, orderly house, and be always nicely dressed, and agreeable, and busy. And in the evenings she will play, and her husband will sing, and they will get artistic people about them, and be interested in and alive to all new improvements. And they will have little parties, and gather clever, amusing people together; and he will talk brilliantly, and she will be intelligent and gay, and smile her pleasant smile; and everybody will say, ‘What a very nice person Mrs. Wentworth is, and what an ornament to society!’ Very different from *your* wife, Philip!”

“You want me to compliment you, Agatha. Well, I don’t care whether or not you are ornamental in other people’s eyes, you always are in mine. But you don’t mean to imply that Katharine is not useful?”

“Not for the world. I believe she is everything that is good and right. You know, Philip, how highly I think of Katharine. I was only taking a cursory view of her as she might appear to other people; and of the points in which she differs most from me. She can do so many more things than I can.”

“You can do one which she cannot,” says Philip, pointing to the organ which stands in the hall. “Go and play to me now whilst we are waiting.”

A solemn strain fills the air, and harmonizes with



the fading light; the grand, full chords of Handel's finest music wake into life beneath Agatha's touch. And then they die away, and a more cheering, stirring sound follows. A sudden thought of her expected guests strikes Agatha, and the joyous, ringing harmonies of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" peal forth. A fitting welcome!

Almost before the last echoes have ceased, a carriage approaches: Agatha hastens to the porch, and Philip runs down the steps; one instant of expectation, and then the carriage stops.

The slight, well-remembered figure of Marmaduke Wentworth springs to the ground; he turns to the assistance of his young wife, but Katharine is too impatient for him, and with her old agility slips past him, hurries up to the porch, and lifts her beaming eyes to Agatha's face; and the two sisters, now *really* sisters in heart and feeling, meet in a close embrace.

What need to look further? The hall door is shut; the guests are welcomed; and all is peace and affection in this new home. Will the old house of Greymore ever be rebuilt? is a question that may arise. It is scarcely possible to answer it.

Agatha has said, and still continues to say, that it never shall be rebuilt by her: the race of Marchmont has passed away. But another, a newer race may rise in its stead; a day may come when Philip's visions of progress and cultivation will be realized;

when these half-desert moors may teem with life and civilization; and then it may be that the old walls will rise as it were from their ashes, and form once more a habitation suited for the lords of the soil. The Marchmonts of Greymore are no more, but the Thorpes of Greymore may yet be famous, and carry down the name of the old dwelling-place to future times.

THE END.

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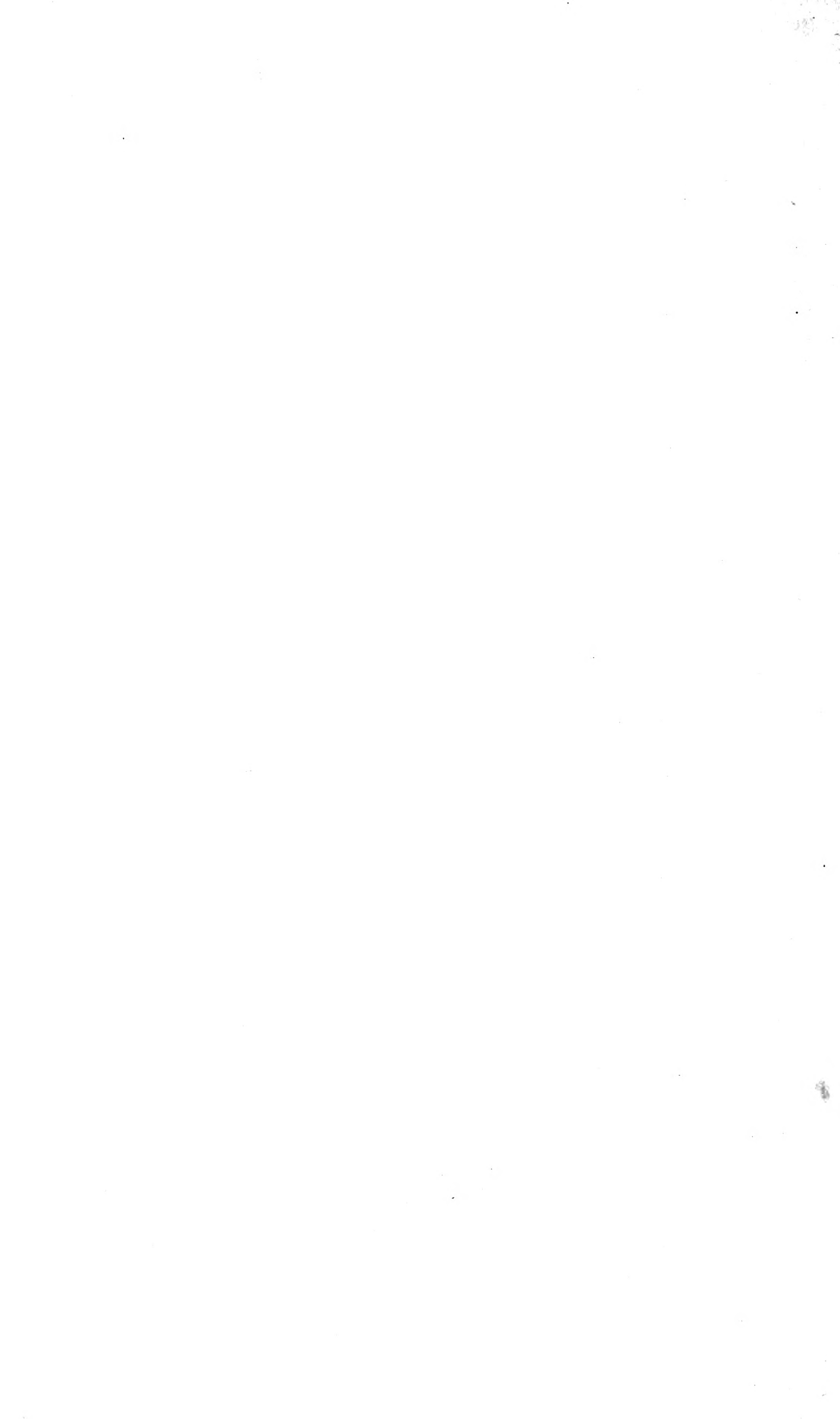
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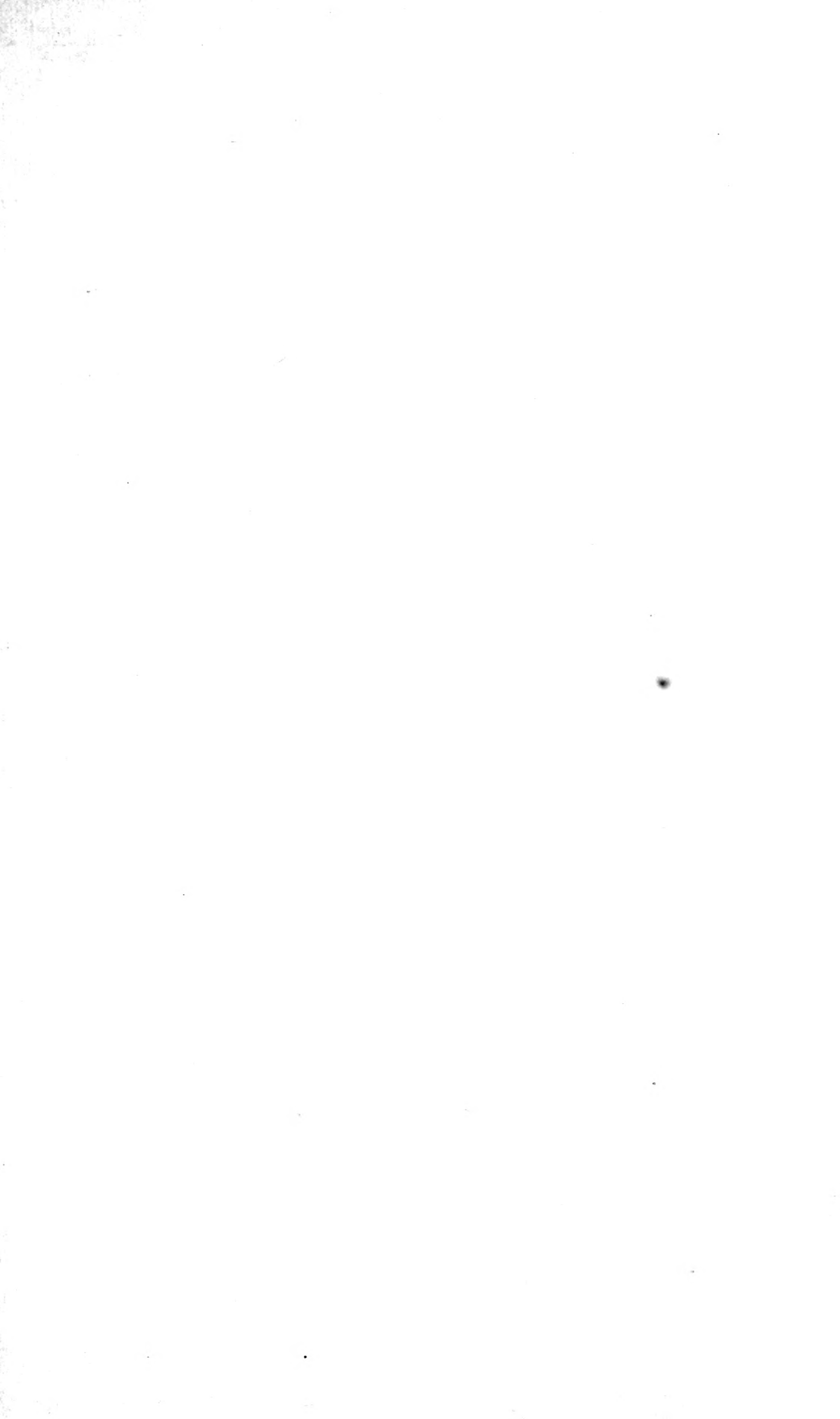
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